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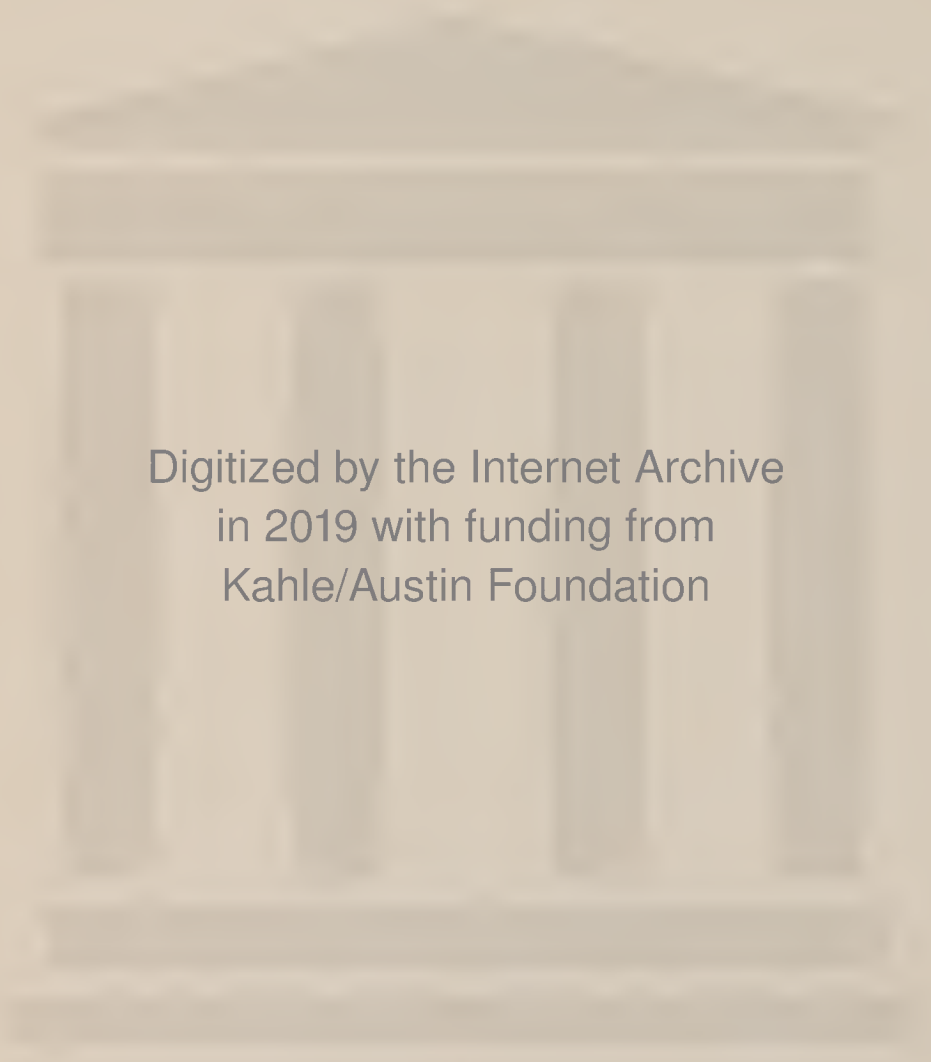
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POETRY & LIFE

MILTON & HIS POETRY

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MILTON & HIS POETRY

BY

WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON

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GENERAL PREFACE

A GLANCE through the pages of this little book will suffice to disclose the general plan of the series of which it forms a part. Only a few words of explanation, therefore, will be necessary.

The point of departure is the undeniable fact that with the vast majority of young students of literature a living interest in the work of any poet can best be aroused, and an intelligent appreciation of it secured, when it is immediately associated with the character and career of the poet himself. The cases are indeed few and far between in which much fresh light will not be thrown upon a poem by some knowledge of the personality of the writer, while it will often be found that the most direct—perhaps even the only—way to the heart of its meaning lies through a consideration of the circumstances in which it had its birth. The purely æsthetic critic may possibly object that a poem should be regarded simply as a self-contained and detached piece of art, having no personal affiliations or bearings. Of the validity of this as an abstract principle nothing need now be said. The fact remains that, in the earlier stages of study at any rate, poetry is most valued and loved when it is made to seem most human and vital; and the human and vital interest of poetry can be most surely brought home to the reader by the biographical method of interpretation.

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This is to some extent recognised by writers of histories and text-books of literature, and by editors of selections from the works of our poets ; for place is always given by them to a certain amount of biographical material. But in the histories and text-books the biography of a given writer stands by itself, and his work has to be sought elsewhere, the student being left to make the connection for himself ; while even in our current editions of selections there is little systematic attempt to link biography, step by step, with production.

This brings us at once to the chief purpose of the present series. In this, biography and production will be considered together and in intimate association. In other words, an endeavour will be made to interest the reader in the lives and personalities of the poets dealt with, and at the same time to use biography as an introduction and key to their writings.

Each volume will therefore contain the life-story of the poet who forms its subject. In this, attention will be specially directed to his personality as it expressed itself in his poetry, and to the influences and conditions which counted most as formative factors in the growth of his genius. This biographical study will be used as a setting for a selection, as large as space will permit, of his representative poems. Such poems, where possible, will be reproduced in full, and care will be taken to bring out their connection with his character, his circumstances, and the movement of his mind. Then, in

addition, so much more general literary criticism will be incorporated as may seem to be needed to supplement the biographical material, and to exhibit both the essential qualities and the historical importance of his work.

It is believed that the plan thus pursued is substantially in the nature of a new departure, and that the volumes of this series, constituting as they will an introduction to the study of some of our greatest poets, will be found useful to teachers and students of literature, and no less to the general lover of English poetry.

WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON

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MILTON AND HIS POETRY

THE work of the Reformation in England was carried out by men of markedly conservative temper, who desired to move cautiously, and who, while recognising the urgent need of change, were averse from any violent rupture with the past. While rejecting the Papacy and correcting various abuses in the organisation and ritual of the national Church, they thus made it one of their principal objects to preserve so far as possible the continuity of religious tradition. In this moderate policy they had the support of the great body of English religious opinion. But as on the one side there were those who opposed any change, so on the other there were a few dissentients who early began to complain of their leaders' timidity and want of thoroughness. To these more radical reformers, whose inspiration and ideals were largely drawn from the teachings of the famous John Calvin of Geneva, the episcopacy was itself a curse, and many of the ceremonial forms of public worship only so many rags and remnants of the Popery they abhorred. Their aim was, therefore, the repudiation root and branch of Papal Christianity, an entire break with long-established tradition, and a return to the absolute simplicity of the primitive Church. These men were the forerunners of the Puritan party—the

party which was presently to maintain that the original Reformation had not gone nearly far enough, and that a new reformation was needed.

Elements of dissension were thus present in Church and country. But for various reasons they were for a time held in check. Early in Elizabeth's reign the struggle with Rome and with Rome's powerful ally, Spain—a struggle in which the very existence of England was imperilled—bred an intense feeling of patriotism, and Englishmen of different parties, sinking private contentions, found themselves standing shoulder to shoulder in a common cause. Public events thus did much to second the efforts of Elizabeth and her counsellors to deepen and develop the sense of national unity. The queen herself, it is true, was strongly hostile to Puritanism, and sought by every means in her power to prevent its progress. In this she failed. But at the close of her reign the spirit of reasonableness and tolerance was abroad in the Church ; there was a temporary lull in internecine strife ; conditions, as it seemed, gave hope of lasting peace.

This hope was rudely dashed at the very beginning of the next reign. A quarrel on Church questions came to a head between the Puritans and James I. before that foolish and contemptible monarch had been twelve months on the throne. Then Convocation, supporting the king, demanded universal conformity with the mode of religious worship as by law established, and, on their refusal, some three hundred clergymen were expelled from their

livings. From this time onward James, and after him his son and successor Charles I., made persistent and resolute efforts to stamp out the Puritan spirit; and year after year, in spite of these efforts—or would it not be more correct to say, largely on account of them?—that spirit continued to spread in the House of Commons and through the middle classes of English society. Into the various controversies which arose concerning theological tenets, Church discipline, and forms of worship we need not here enter. But stress must be laid upon two important points. In the first place, the moral ideals of Puritanism were greatly strengthened and its national significance intensified by the fast-growing flippancy and licentiousness of the Court and the aristocracy. In the second place, theological and ecclesiastical questions were now closely entangled with questions of secular government, and the result was that Puritanism became political. Its vivid sense of the power of God and the supremacy of His law made it intolerant of undue claims on the part of any earthly ruler; while the attempts of the Stuarts to flout the Commons and the people and to make good their monstrous principle of "the right divine of kings to govern wrong"—the duplicity and tyranny of Charles—the repressive policy of Archbishop Laud and his determined efforts to enforce his will by persecution—combined to drive many who had little or no sympathy with its ecclesiastical theories or its theology into union with it in its opposition to a despotic king

and a dictatorial Church. So the Puritan party emerged at a time of serious crisis as the upholders of our Constitution and the great bulwark of our jeopardised liberties. For what they then did for the England of their own day and of ours we owe them a debt of gratitude the magnitude of which it would not be easy to exaggerate.

That the spirit of Puritanism was necessarily productive of vast and far-reaching changes in the temper of English society is on the face of it evident. It is by reference to it, indeed, that we can largely explain the enormous difference which separates the England of the middle of the reign of Elizabeth from the England which saw the meeting of the Long Parliament. It meant, among other things which we must not here stop to consider, the evolution of a noble but stern and hard type of character ; preoccupation with the most narrowly religious aspects of man's conduct, aims, and destiny ; and, in consequence, the general repudiation of the claims of art, science, humane culture, and whatever else helps to beautify, uplift, and give value to our secular life. Thus, amid much that was so excellent in the way of strength, uprightness, and integrity, the growth of Puritanism was inevitably accompanied by a widespread tendency towards fanaticism, moroseness, and gloom. God-fearing, high-principled, courageous and earnest the Puritan was ; but he was austere, exacting, and uncharitable. We admire his great qualities ; but we are still painfully aware that these were too often cultivated

at the expense of that flexibility, catholicity, and many-sidedness of interest which are needed to make human nature not only engaging but complete. His one absorbing concern was the salvation of his soul, and as this was a matter of infinite difficulty, it called for all his thought and all his effort, for constant watching, incessant prayers, daily and nightly wrestlings with God. To one whose mind was thus fixed upon eternal realities all earthly things were vain and fleeting shows, or, rather, they were the snares and traps of the Evil One intent upon his spiritual ruin. Puritanism was thus fatal to art, and all but fatal to literature; and even such literature as it did inspire bore the unmistakable impress of its limitations no less than of its strength. Shakespeare's drama deals in the spirit of the largest tolerance with the complex tragedy and comedy of human life, with little reference to anything that may lie beyond it in the sphere of the unseen. Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" directs the Christian through the trials and temptations of this world in his passage towards the Celestial City. Milton's "Paradise Lost" sets out to "justify the ways of God to men."

It is a fact of the utmost importance to the student of literary history that, as John Addington Symonds pointed out, "England, alone of European nations, received the influences of both Renaissance and Reformation simultaneously." These two great movements arose out of the same general impulses; strictly speaking, indeed, the Reformation was only one

aspect of the Renaissance. Their co-operation had much to do with the essential greatness of our Elizabethan literature, in which, as in no other body of literature belonging to the same period, a passionate love of beauty is combined with religious fervour and a strenuous moral idealism. Yet, despite their common origin, it was inevitable that, as time went on, the spirit of the Renaissance and the spirit of the Reformation should come into conflict. This conflict opened as soon as, on the one hand, religion began to separate itself from humane culture, and, on the other hand, humane culture began to ignore the claims of religion ; with the corresponding growth of Puritanism and of fashionable license, the breach widened ; by the time we reach the reign of Charles I. the rupture is complete.

In the foregoing paragraphs, as I need hardly say, no attempt has been made to trace the history of Puritanism in detail, or to give a full account of the consequences resulting from its development as the chief force in English life and thought during the second quarter of the seventeenth century. My slight sketch is intended only to prepare the way for the study of the great poet whose writings we are now to take up together. Milton has been described as "not only the highest, but the completest type of Puritanism." How far, and with what qualifications, this description is to be accepted, will become apparent as we go on with our work. But let us at the outset note that his life extended

from the period during which the Puritan cause was slowly but surely winning its way in England, through the whole period of its political ascendancy, and onward into the period of its overthrow with the Stuart restoration. As Green put it, Milton was born when "Puritanism began to exercise a direct power over English politics and English religion; he died when its effort to mould them into its own shape was over, and when it had again sunk into one of the many influences to which we owe our English character." We shall find that the recognition of these facts and a constant sense of the intimate relations between the poet and the large public movements of his time are essential to any proper understanding of Milton and his work.

II

THOUGH, like Chaucer, Spenser, Ben Jonson, Pope, Gray, and Keats, a Londoner by birth, John Milton came of an Oxfordshire yeoman stock. His father, whose name also was John, had been disowned by his family upon his abandonment of Roman Catholicism for the reformed faith. He had thereupon settled in the metropolis, where he presently became a scrivener.[1] A man distinguished by intellectual ability as well as by "the wonderful integrity of his life,"[2] he prospered in his calling, but, after

[1] The profession of scrivener included, along with money-lending, many of the functions now performed by solicitors.

[2] Milton's "Defensio Secunda" (Bohn's edition of his "Prose Works," vol. i.).

the fashion of the time, continued to live over his place of business, at the sign of the Spread Eagle, in Bread Street, Cheapside. It was there, on December 9, 1608, that his eldest son, the future poet, first saw the light. It is interesting to remember that not far away, though on the other side of the street, stood the Mermaid Tavern, famous as the meeting-place of Shakespeare, Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, and other wits of the day. Shakespeare left London for Stratford when Milton was only three or four years old; but it is just barely possible that in passing along Bread Street he may have seen the lovely child whose name was, in after-times, to stand second only to his own on the splendid bead-roll of our English poets.

The elder Milton, though of pronounced Puritan proclivities, did not share the antipathy of the extremists of his party to literature and art; he was, in fact, an accomplished musician and a composer of some standing among his contemporaries; and his love of music embraced madrigals as well as psalms. Life in the Bread Street home, while characteristically sober and even a little austere, was by no means lacking in the influences of liberal culture and refinement; and it was thus in a singularly favourable atmosphere that Milton's nature began to expand. He grew up a wonderfully beautiful boy; as we look at his portrait, painted when he was ten by the skilful artist Cornelius Jansen, we instinctively feel that he must indeed have been the pride of his mother's

heart. Like all other poets, he fell in after-life into the habit of transferring his own experiences to his dramatic characters, and there can, I think, be little question that he was recalling his childhood in the words which, as an old man, he put upon the lips of Jesus in "Paradise Regained":

> When I was yet a child, no childish play
> To Me was pleasing; all My mind was set
> Serious to learn and know, and thence to do,
> What might be public Good; Myself I thought
> Born to that end, born to promote all truth,
> All righteous things: therefore, above My years
> The Law of God I read and found it sweet.[1]

That the scrivener very early recognised his son's genius seems clear; "my father," Milton records, "destined me from a child to the pursuit of literature." His education as a boy was the best that London afforded. At first he received private lessons from an excellent tutor, Thomas Young, afterwards well known as a Puritan divine; and when presently he was sent to St. Paul's School, his regular training there was still supplemented by instruction at home. From the beginning he devoted himself to his studies with tireless enthusiasm, thus as a boy laying the firm foundations of his immense erudition, and also unfortunately of that complaint of the eyes which was by-and-by to end in total blindness. "My appetite for knowledge," he says, "was so voracious, that from

[1] I. 201-207.

twelve years of age I hardly ever left my studies, or went to bed before midnight. This primarily led to my loss of sight. My eyes were naturally weak, and I was subject to frequent headaches, which, however, could not chill the ardour of my curiosity, or retard the progress of my development."[1] In this way, he tells us, "he acquired a proficiency in various languages." The Latin and Greek classics were, of course, the chief subjects of his attention; but he probably made a beginning also with French and Italian, and even perhaps with Hebrew, for in 1625, just before he went to Cambridge, he wrote acknowledging a "desirable present of a Hebrew Bible," which he had "long since received" from his former tutor, Young. Nor was English neglected. Whether as yet he had read Shakespeare in the great first folio edition of 1623 is a matter of conjecture only; but he certainly knew Spenser, whom he afterwards praised as a better moral teacher than Scotus or Aquinas, and Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas' sacred poem, "Divine Weeks and Words." As this poem deals with the creation and the fall of man the interest of his early acquaintance with it is apparent.

It is, of course, not in the least surprising that while still a schoolboy Milton also tried his hand at poetic composition. This is only what we should expect. But so far as we are able to judge, his first attempts gave no unusual promise. Two have been preserved; they are his

[1] "Defensio Secunda."

paraphrases, "done by the author," according to his own note, "at fifteen years old," of Psalms 114 and 136. The latter, beginning

> Let us, with a gladsome mind,
> Praise the Lord, for He is kind:
> For His Mercies aye endure,
> Ever faithful, ever sure,

keeps its place in our hymn-books. It has fluency and some grace, but is certainly in no way remarkable. Perhaps the most interesting thing about it to the student of Milton's poetic development is the fact that in such lines as those about "the golden-tressèd sun" and "the hornèd moon . . . amongst her spangled sisters bright," he touches the plain simplicity of the original poem with ideas derived from classical mythology and quite foreign to the temper of the Hebrew mind. We have here a first slight indication of that union of the Hebraic and the classical which, as we shall see, was afterwards so marked a feature of his work. For the time being, however, his powers were shown rather in the accumulation of knowledge than in creation or self-expression.

When at the age of sixteen Milton entered Christ's College, Cambridge, his scholastic acquirements were indeed such that the university authorities, without lowering their standards, might have given him his degree at the outset. He remained at Cambridge seven years, becoming Bachelor of Arts in 1629 and Master in 1632. At the beginning of his academic

career things did not go very smoothly with him. Trouble arose between him and his college tutor, and some breach of discipline, resulting from what he himself confesses to have been the "indocility" of his character, was visited with punishment. His first feelings for Cambridge were, therefore, none of the kindest, and in a Latin elegy addressed in the spring of 1626 to his school friend, Charles Diodati, we find him delighting in his enforced exile in London, where he is at leisure to live among his beloved books, and, when tired of reading (so far as yet is he from the prejudices of the severer type of Puritan), to enjoy the distractions of the town and the theatre. These initial difficulties were, however, only temporary; he soon returned to college; and though he never grew to love Cambridge, his course there was henceforth undisturbed, and, from the scholastic point of view, satisfactory. Chiefly on account of the fairness of his complexion and his personal beauty, but also undoubtedly in part because of the purity of his life and conversation, he was dubbed by his college companions "the Lady" —a nickname which displeased him as reflecting upon his manliness, even though manliness as then and there understood meant principally the ability "to quaff huge tankards" and indulge in the grossest debaucheries. For his own part, he made bold to declare, he preferred to show his manliness in other ways—"by living modestly and temperately," and so keeping "the heavenly strength of the mind pure and

stainless." Wordsworth has given us a charming picture of Milton during these college days:

> Yea, our blind Poet, who, in his later day,
> Stood almost single; uttering odious truth
> Darkness before, and danger's voice behind,
> Soul awful—if the earth has ever lodged
> An awful soul—I seemed to see him here
> Familiarly, and in his scholar's dress
> Bounding before me, yet a stripling youth—
> A boy, no better, with his rosy cheeks
> Angelical, keen eye, courageous look,
> And conscious step of purity and pride.[1]

Under the form of pastoral allegory, Milton himself in his "Lycidas," to be quoted presently, also speaks, in a passage of supreme beauty, of his life at Cambridge.

It was now that his poetic impulse really awoke, and during these seven years he produced, not indeed very freely, but enough to show, amid all the preoccupations of his studies, a growing consciousness of purpose and power. Most of his college poems are occasional in character and rather slight; they are in general immature, sometimes even clumsy, in expression; and, as we should anticipate in the work of a young man of his bookish interests and wide scholarship, they contain many echoes and reminiscences of other literatures, ancient and modern. But here and there, along with so much which attests that Milton had not yet found himself, we come upon lines and passages in which is prophetically sounded the

[1] "The Prelude," iii. 283-292.

characteristic note of the great poetry of the years to come. Among these youthful efforts one stands out supreme—the noble ode "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity." Written in 1629, when Milton was only twenty-one, this has been placed by some of our critics among the very finest odes in the language. The implied praise is, I think, excessive. Perfect the piece certainly is not. It is rugged in metre and unequal in style; it is also now and then marred by conceits; for example, the conception with which the hymn begins, of Nature doffing "her gaudy trim" out of sympathy with "her great Master" in the hour of His lowly birth, jars upon us as too fantastic and unreal for so lofty a theme. But, all deductions made, it is still a great poem, vigorous in thought and language, often indeed splendid in diction, and occasionally even rising into that grand manner which was to be one of the outstanding qualities of Milton's mature work. The easy assurance with which the young poet handles the learning with which he enriches his subject also calls for remark, for this too is characteristically Miltonic. Nor must the reader fail to appreciate the skill with which the materials are arranged, and much that lies outside the immediate topic is brought into the framework. We have first the simple details of the Saviour's birth, the setting of the scene, the song of the angels to the listening shepherds, and the promise which it seems to bring of the speedy coming of the Golden Age to men; then, by an abrupt but singularly

effective transition, the poet passes directly to a prophetic vision of that dread Judgment Day through which alone God's purposes are to be consummated ; after which he goes back to describe the instant overthrow of the pagan gods and their oracles, returning suddenly at the end to the lowly manger where the Virgin Mother is laying her Babe to rest, and thus closing upon the note with which he had opened—the note of calm and peace. There is nothing of mere happy accident about this plan. Milton evidently thought out his poem as an organic whole ; the different parts of it arise out of and support one another ; and the contrast provided by variety in details and tones is attained without sacrifice of essential unity. We thus learn that already Milton was a conscientious and painstaking poetic artist.

ON THE MORNING OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY

I

This is the month, and this the happy morn,
Wherein the Son of Heav'n's Eternal King,
Of wedded maid and virgin mother born,
Our great redemption from Above did bring ;
For so the Holy Sages once did sing,
That He our deadly forfeit should release,
And with His Father work us a perpetual peace.

II

That glorious Form, that Light unsuff'rable,
And that far-beaming blaze of Majesty,
Wherewith He wont at Heav'n's high Council-table

To sit the midst of Trinal Unity,
He laid aside ; and, here with us to be,
  Forsook the Courts of everlasting Day,
And chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay.

III

Say, heav'nly Muse, shall not thy sacred vein
Afford a present to the Infant-God ?
Hast thou no verse, no hymn or solemn strain,
To welcome Him to this His new abode,
Now while the heav'n, by the Sun's team untrod,
  Hath took no print of the approaching light,
And all the spangled hosts keep watch in squadrons
    bright ?

IV

See, how from far, upon the eastern road,
The star-led wisards haste with odours sweet !
Oh, run, prevent them with thy humble ode,
And lay it lowly at His blessed feet ;
Have thou the honour first thy Lord to greet,
  And join thy voice unto the Angel quire,
From out His secret altar touched with hallowed fire.

THE HYMN

I

It was the winter wild,
While the Heav'n-born Child
  All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies :
Nature, in awe, to Him
Had doffed her gaudy trim,
  With her great Master so to sympathize :
It was no season then for her
To wanton with the Sun, her lusty paramour.

II

Only with speeches fair
She woos the gentle air
To hide her guilty front with innocent snow :
And on her naked shame,
Pollute with sinful blame,
The saintly veil of maiden white to throw ;
Confounded, that her Maker's eyes
Should look so near upon her foul deformities.

III

But He, her fears to cease,
Sent down the meek-eyed Peace ;
She, crowned with olive green, came softly sliding
Down through the turning sphere,
His ready harbinger,
With turtle wing the am'rous clouds dividing ;
And, waving wide her myrtle wand,
She strikes a universal peace through sea and land.

IV

No war, or battle's sound,
Was heard the world around :
The idle spear and shield were high up hung ;
The hookèd chariot stood
Unstained with hostile blood ;
The trumpet spake not to the armèd throng ;
And kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by.

V

But peaceful was the night,
Wherein the Prince of Light
His reign of peace upon the Earth began :

The winds with wonder whist,
Smoothly the waters kissed,
  Whisp'ring new joys to the mild ocean,
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmèd
    wave.

VI

The stars, with deep amaze,
Stand fixed in stedfast gaze,
  Bending one way their precious influence ;
And will not take their flight,
For all the morning light,
  Or Lucifer that often warned them thence ;
But in their glimm'ring orbs did glow,
Until their Lord Himself bespake, and bid them go.

VII

And, though the shady gloom
Had given Day her room,
  The Sun himself withheld his wonted speed,
And hid his head for shame,
As his inferior flame
  The new enlightened world no more should need ;
He saw a Greater Sun appear
Than his bright throne, or burning axletree, could
    bear.

VIII

The shepherds on the lawn,
Or e'er the point of dawn,
  Sat simply chatting in a rustic row ;
Full little thought they then,
That the mighty Pan [1]

[1] In Greek mythology, the great god of shepherds and their flocks. The curious identification of Pan with the Good Shepherd is thus explained. See John x. 2.

Was kindly come to live with them below ;
Perhaps their loves, or else their sheep,
Was all that did their silly thoughts so busy keep.

IX

When such music sweet
Their hearts and ears did greet
As never was by mortal finger struck ;
Divinely-warbled voice
Answ'ring the stringèd noise,
As all their souls in blissful rapture took :
The air, such pleasure loth to lose,
With thousand echoes still prolongs each Heav'nly close.

X

Nature that heard such sound,
Beneath the hollow round
Of Cynthia's [1] seat, the aery region thrilling,
Now was almost won
To think her part was done,
And that her reign had here its last fulfilling ;
She knew such harmony alone
Could hold all Heav'n and Earth in happier uniön.

XI

At last surrounds their sight
A globe of circular light,
That with long beams the shamefaced night arrayed ;
The helmèd Cherubim,
And sworded Seraphim,
Are seen in glitt'ring ranks with wings displayed,
Harping in loud and solemn quire,
With unexpressive notes, to Heaven's new-born Heir.

[1] Twin-sister of Apollo, and connected with the moon as Apollo was with the sun.

XII

Such music (as 'tis said)
Before was never made,
  But when of old the Sons of Morning sung,
While the Creator great
His constellations set,
  And the well-balanced world on hinges hung ;
And cast the dark foundations deep,
And bid the welt'ring waves their oozy channel keep.

XIII

Ring out, ye Crystal Spheres,
Once bless our human ears,
  If ye have pow'r to touch our senses so ;
And let your silver chime
Move in melodious time ;
  And let the bass of Heav'n's deep organ blow ;
And, with your ninefold harmony,
Make up full consort to th' angelic symphony.

XIV

For, if such holy song
Enwrap our fancy long,
  Time will run back, and fetch the Age of Gold ;
And speckled Vanity
Will sicken soon and die,
  And leprous Sin will melt from earthly mould ;
And Hell itself will pass away,
And leave her dol'rous mansions to the peering Day.

XV

Yea, Truth and Justice then
Will down return to Men,
  Orbed in a rainbow ; and, like glories wearing,

Mercy will sit between,
Throned in celestial sheen,
With radiant feet the tissued clouds down steering ;
And Heav'n, as at some festival,
Will open wide the gates of her high palace hall.

XVI

But wisest Fate says, " No,
This must not yet be so."
The Babe yet lies in smiling infancy,
That on the bitter Cross
Must redeem our loss ;
So both Himself and us to glorify :
Yet first, to those ychained in sleep,
The wakeful trump of Doom must thunder through the Deep,

XVII

With such a horrid clang
As on Mount Sinai rang,
While the red fire and smould'ring clouds out brake :
The agèd Earth aghast,
With terrour of that blast,
Shall from the surface to the centre shake ;
When, at the World's last session,
The dreadful Judge in middle air shall spread His throne.

XVIII

And then at last our bliss
Full and perfect is,
But now begins ; for, from this happy day,
Th' old Dragon, under ground
In straiter limits bound,
Not half so far casts his usurpèd sway ;

And, wroth to see his kingdom fail,
Swinges the scaly horrour of his folded tail.

XIX

The oracles are dumb,
No voice or hideous hum
  Runs through the archèd roof in words deceiving.
Apollo from his shrine
Can no more divine,
  With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos[1] leaving.
No nightly trance, or breathèd spell,
Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the prophetic cell.

XX

The lonely mountains o'er,
And the resounding shore,
  A voice of weeping heard and loud lament;
From haunted spring and dale,
Edged with poplar pale,
  The parting Genius is with sighing sent;
With flow'r-inwoven tresses torn
The Nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets
    mourn.

XXI

In consecrated earth,
And on the holy hearth,
  The Lars and Lemures[2] moan with midnight plaint;
In urns and altars round
A drear and dying sound
  Affrights the Flamens[3] at their service quaint;
And the chill marble seems to sweat,
While each peculiar Pow'r forgoes his wonted seat.

[1] Otherwise Delphi; the principal seat of the worship of Apollo, whose great oracle was here.
[2] "Lares" were Roman tutelary deities of the household; "Lemures" spectres, or spirits (especially wicked spirits) of the dead.
[3] Priests.

XXII

Peor and Baälim[1]
Forsake their temples dim,
With that twice-battered god of Palestine;[2]
And moonèd Ashtaroth,[3]
Heav'n's Queen and Mother both,
Now sits not girt with tapers' holy shine;
The Lybic Hammon[4] shrinks his horn,
In vain the Tyrian maids their wounded Thammuz[5] mourn.

XXIII

And sullen Moloch,[6] fled,
Hath left in shadows dread
His burning idol all of blackest hue;
In vain with cymbals' ring
They call the grisly king,
In dismal dance about the furnace blue;
The brutish gods of Nile as fast,
Isis[7] and Orus,[8] and the dog Anubis,[9] haste.

XXIV

Nor is Osiris seen[10]
In Memphian grove or green,
Trampling the unshowered grass with lowings loud;
Nor can he be at rest
Within his sacred chest;
Nought but profoundest Hell can be his shroud;
In vain with timbrelled anthems dark
The sable-stolèd sorc'rers bear his worshipped ark.

[1] Peor was one of the Baalim, or Phœnician deities. [2] Dagon.
[3] Hebrew for Astarte, the Syrian Aphrodite.
[4] Amun, an Egyptian god of flocks, represented with the horns of a ram.
[5] The Syrian Adonis; according to the legend, he was slain by a boar, but was revived for six months of every year.
[6] A Canaanitish sun-god whose worship was accompanied by human sacrifices. [7] Goddess of the earth, and wife of Osiris.
[8] The Egyptian sun-god. [9] A dog-god of the Egyptians.
[10] The Nile-god.

XXV

He feels from Juda's land
The dreaded Infant's Hand,
  The rays of Bethl'hem blind his dusky ey'n ;
Nor all the gods beside
Longer dare abide,
  Not Typhon huge ending in snaky twine :
Our Babe, to show His Godhead true,
Can in His swaddling-bands control the damnèd
    crew.

XXVI

So, when the Sun in bed,
Curtained with cloudy red,
  Pillows his chin upon an orient wave,
The flocking shadows pale
Troop to th' infernal jail,
  Each fettered ghost slips to his sev'ral grave ;
And the yellow-skirted Fays
Fly after the night-steeds, leaving their moon-loved
    maze.

XXVII

But see, the Virgin blest
Hath laid her Babe to rest !
  Time is our tedious song should here have ending ;
Heav'n's youngest teemèd star
Hath fixed her polished car,
  Her sleeping Lord with handmaid-lamp attending ;
And all about the courtly stable
Bright-harnessed Angels sit in order serviceable.

Before we pass from this poem, a word must be said about the place that it occupies in the development of Milton's mind. Both by its subject-matter, and by its marked sincerity and

earnestness, it testifies to the sobriety of the young poet's temper and to his interest in religious things. Yet there is nothing in it to foreshadow his later Puritanism, nothing to distinguish it as the work of one who was presently to use the forms of the ancient epic as the vehicle of a Puritan theology. It is, in fact, just such a poem as, given the necessary genius, any serious-minded young college man might very well have written ; and in its curious blending of Christian thought and classical imagery and ideas it is entirely in keeping with the poetic habits of a time when, under the powerful traditions of the Renaissance, men perpetually drew upon pagan literature and mythology even when they were dealing with the most vital questions of their religious faith. Let me take the opportunity of insisting here upon a point which is of the utmost importance to the student who would follow the course of Milton's intellectual history. Two great influences were to enter into and fashion his poetic powers—the influence of classicism and the influence of Puritanism. Of these, the former was for the moment completely in the ascendant. The Puritanism was as yet latent only. The spirit of the Renaissance, whose child on one side he was, claimed him for its own. In thinking of his life-work as a whole, we commonly emphasise so strongly the purely religious and moral side of it, and the Hebraic zeal or righteousness which in later life came to govern all his efforts, that we are apt to lose sight of the

fact that in him this Hebraic zeal for righteousness was combined with a true Hellenic feeling for beauty and love of knowledge. The Hebrew and the Hellene, as we may therefore say, were always present together in Milton's poetry ; but they were present in very different proportions at different stages of his career ; and at the opening of it, the Hellene was paramount. In a striking passage in a letter dated September 23, 1637, to his friend Diodati, he afterwards wrote of himself : "Whatever the Deity may have bestowed upon me in other respects, He has certainly inspired me, if any ever were inspired, with a passion for the good and the beautiful. Nor did Ceres, according to the fable, ever seek her daughter Proserpine with such unceasing solicitude as I have sought this idea of the beautiful in all the forms and appearances of things, for many are the shapes of things divine. Day and night I am wont to continue my search." This is remarkable language. Not even Keats, who had little of the Hebraic in his composition, and to whom "a thing of beauty" was "a joy for ever," could have written of his own devotion to beauty more fervently than this ; and what we have specially to remember is, that it was with this intense love of the beautiful "in all forms and appearances of things," that our great Puritan poet, with whom presently "the ways of God to men" were to be the primary concern, actually set out on his career.

Yet in one poem of this period the strong

Hebrew or Puritan note is distinctly struck. A friend—perhaps his old tutor Young, but of this we cannot be sure—had written remonstrating with him on his apparently aimless way of life. He replied at length in a letter apologetic in tone but full of self-searching and anxiety; towards the end of which he says: "Yet that you may see that I am something suspicious of myself, and do take notice of a certain belatedness in me, I am the bolder to send you some of my nightward thoughts some while since . . . made up in a Petrarchian stanza." Then follows what has been justly called "one of the most solemn and beautiful pieces of personal writing in English poetry"—the sonnet, not so named by Milton himself, who left it nameless, but now generally entitled:

ON HIS HAVING ARRIVED AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-THREE

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
Stol'n on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!
My hasting days fly on with full career,
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.
Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth
That I to manhood am arrived so near;
And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
That some more timely-happy sp'rits endu'th.
Yet, be it less or more, or soon or slow,
It shall be still in strictest measure ev'n,
To that same lot, however mean or high,
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heav'n.
All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great Task-Master's eye.

This sonnet was written by Milton on the eve of his leaving Cambridge, and clearly marks his sense that he was now about to open a new chapter in his history. Youth was over; he stood on the threshold of manhood, with all its temptations and duties; and it was in this fine spirit of self-dedication to the highest aims in life that he turned his back upon his college walls and went forth into the world. Come what might, he was solemnly resolved henceforth to live as in God's sight and for God's service.

III

HIS father had designed that he should enter the Church, and this he had himself regarded, from childhood up, as his settled vocation. But before his Cambridge course had closed he had come to realise that for him Holy Orders were impossible. "To the service of the Church," he afterwards wrote, "by the intentions of my parents and friends, I was destined of a child, and by mine own resolution; till coming to some maturity of years, and perceiving what tyranny had invaded the Church, that he who would take orders must subscribe slave, and take an oath withal, which, unless he took with a conscience that would retch [stretch], he must either straight perjure, or split his faith; I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the sacred office of

speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing."[1] Here we have the first indication of Milton's quarrel with the ecclesiasticism of his time. The Church abandoned, he thought next of the Law; but he thought of it only to dismiss it from his mind. Thereupon he determined to devote himself, not to practical life under any of its aspects, or to the amassing of wealth, but to study, self-culture, and poetry. That in poetry he now saw, as he believed, his true calling, is evident; nor is it less evident that he had already a strong conviction of his fast-growing powers; he knew nothing of false modesty, and again and again in autobiographical passages in his writings his superb self-confidence is frankly expressed. Fortunately for him, his father was willing, and, owing to his comfortable circumstances, was also able, to allow him to take his own course. No outside pressure appears to have been brought to bear upon him, and he was left to shape his career in accordance with his personal desires and aims. Few poets standing on the threshold of life have been as happily placed as Milton was in respect of immediate conditions and opportunities.

The elder Milton, now retired from business, had bought a country house in the village of Horton, Buckinghamshire, some seventeen miles from London. It was in this rural spot, set in the midst of a beautiful and peaceful landscape, that Milton now took up his abode, and here,

1 "The Reason of Church Government" (1641).

from July 1632 to April 1638, he spent nearly six years of scholarly seclusion. During this time, he tells us, he "occasionally visited the metropolis, either for the sake of purchasing books or of learning something new in mathematics or in music"; [1] but save for these slight interruptions, life at Horton was placid and uneventful—a life of steady industry passed day by day and week by week "in the quiet air of delightful studies." If, as I have said, he had already come to regard poetry as the great business to which all his genius and energies were to be given, it is now important to add that no poet before or since has ever devoted himself more ardently, more persistently, more single-heartedly to self-preparation for his future work. The range of his reading was enormous, comprehending the whole field of history and all that was best in ancient and modern literatures; and his learning was accurate as well as wide. Nor was he satisfied, like the mere scholar, simply to absorb. He read always with mind alert and vigilant, thus making his studies fruitful in personal growth. Many years later he wrote:

> Who reads
> Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
> A spirit and judgment equal or superior,
> Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
> Deep vers'd in books, and shallow in himself.[2]

Milton knew from personal experience and his long years of patient self-discipline the difference

[1] "Defensio Secunda." [2] "Paradise Regained," IV. 322-326.

between the right way of using books and the wrong way. With him extending scholarship meant at the same time increase in power and depth. His learning thus became part and parcel of himself ; it was, as Hartley Coleridge put it, amalgamated and consubstantiated with his native thought ; and when he employed it in his poetry with, as most of us are rather humiliated to feel, too little respect for the ignorance of the average reader, still he employed it in no pedantic spirit, and simply because it was for him a natural instrument of expression. It is quite true that he often abused his scholarship. But let us understand how it came to be so distinctive a feature of his poetic work. His mind was literally stored with varied learning, and when this learning was touched and fired by the imagination, it poured out, flood-like, into his verse. It is evident that in later life, when the " total eclipse " of blindness had fallen upon him, he loved to let his memory travel far and wide over the vast fields of knowledge which he had formerly explored, and that it gave him the keenest pleasure to recall his early studies, and to draw upon the treasures which as a young man he had amassed. Hence the learned borrowings and illustrations, the bookish analogies and metaphors, the long erudite digressions and disquisitions, which abound in "Paradise Lost." We call Milton a scholar-poet, as we call Spenser and Gray, Tennyson and Longfellow, scholar-poets, not because he was a scholar who also wrote poetry,

but because his poetry is everywhere interpenetrated by his scholarship and enriched by it.

Thus far we have spoken of these six years of retirement as a time only of self-culture and of preparation for future work. But they were years of production also, and the poems which Milton now wrote, even if "Paradise Lost" had never followed, would in themselves have sufficed to give him a high place among the greatest masters of our literature. It is to these poems of what is commonly called his Horton period that we have now to turn.

The list opens with a sonnet as beautiful in its own way as that which had so fittingly closed his Cambridge life, but in character very different from this. Of the circumstances which inspired it we know nothing for certain; we do not even know if it had its source in any personal experience; but it is natural to conjecture that the young poet's heart was touched either by tender passion or by the vague love-longing which comes so easily to youth, and that he is not feigning emotion or speaking with accents of mere convention when he describes himself as, for the moment, servant alike of the Muse and of Love. At any rate, whatever interpretation we may put upon the poem, the reader will cherish it simply for its intrinsic grace and charm. As a matter of detail we should remember that, as Masson points out, there is in it "a recollection of the superstition that he who hears the nightingale before he hears the cuckoo will woo fortunately before the year is over."

TO THE NIGHTINGALE

O Nightingale, that on yon bloomy spray
  Warbl'st at eve, when all the woods are still;
  Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart dost fill,
While the jolly Hours lead on propitious May.
Thy liquid notes that close the eye of day,
  First heard before the shallow cuckoo's bill,
  Portend success in love; oh, if Jove's will
  Have linked that am'rous pow'r to thy soft lay,
Now timely sing, ere the rude bird of hate
  Foretell my hopeless doom in some grove nigh;
  As thou from year to year hast sung too late
For my relief, yet hadst no reason why:
  Whether the Muse, or Love, call thee his mate,
  Both them I serve, and of their train am I.

We are probably safe in assigning this sonnet to 1632. The next year Milton wrote two of the best-known and best-loved of all English minor poems—the exquisite connected idylls "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso."

For the mere enjoyment of these poems in all the beauty of their descriptions and the rare felicity of their diction and versification little preliminary explanation is called for. Every reader will note for himself that, though each is complete and perfect within its own limits, they are conceived and wrought as studies in contrast, and that their full meaning can be apprehended only when they are taken together. Nature, art, and human life are interpreted in them as they are seen through the atmosphere of two opposed moods—the mood of gladness and the

mood of pensive melancholy. In a broad way, the resulting difference in spirit and tone is at once clear. But, as closer consideration will show, the contrast is not of broad effects only ; the parallelism is worked out in detail from scene to scene and from impression to impression. Hence the need of continual reference from either poem to the companion piece. It should, however, be remarked that the contrast does not lie in the difference between the same things differently viewed ; it lies deeper—in the difference between the aspects of nature, art, and human life, as selected now by one mood and now by the other. Two ideal days are represented : the ideal day of a gay, vivacious youth, beginning at morning with the song of the lark and ending with the pleasures of evening ; and the ideal day of a studious, melancholy youth, beginning at evening with the song of the nightingale and, after a period of night study and a snatch of morning sleep, ending with an early service in the cathedral. It is thus the balance between these two days and the skilful way in which the particulars of the one are made to answer those of the other that we should be specially careful to observe. Both pictures are painted with a fine abandonment to the prevailing mood, and the reader may therefore be left to make his own choice between them. It is not difficult, however, to perceive the line of Milton's own preference. A comparison between the closing passages of the two poems will show that while " L'Allegro " rests in the present, " Il

Penseroso " looks forward to the future. This suggests that the more serious thought of life expressed in the second poem has for Milton a more lasting value than the lighter thought set forth in the first.

While primarily interesting, however, by reason of their great beauty, these two idylls are further important as revelations of the poet's mind at the time of their composition. Their spirit is singularly pure and noble , in the gaiety of the one there is nothing that is petty, trivial, or base ; in the melancholy of the other, nothing morbid or unworthy. At the same time, there is little that is distinctively Puritan in either, and much that is, in fact, quite anti-Puritan in both of them. In " L'Allegro " the echoes of romance, the dancing and rustic sports, the visit to the playhouse and the references to Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, certainly do not give us any hint of the fanatical austerity which was presently to shut the theatres, pull down the maypoles on the village greens, and turn " Merrie England " into " Psalm-singing England." In " Il Penseroso " the poet dwells upon his love of pagan learning, and in imagination he haunts the cathedral, and enjoys the beauty of its dim aisles, the sounds of the rolling organ, and the solemn liturgy of the English Church ; and thus again he shows no trace of sympathy with the extremists to whom all these things were anathema. For the time being, there is still far more of the Hellenic than of the Puritan in Milton, and the influence of the

Renaissance, however much tempered by the poet's profoundly religious character, is the dominating influence in his work.

L'ALLEGRO

Hence, loathèd Melancholy,
Of Cerberus[1] and blackest Midnight born,
In Stygian cave[2] forlorn,
'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy!
Find out some uncouth cell,
Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings,
And the night-raven sings;
There under ebon shades and low-browed rocks,
As ragged as thy locks,
In dark Cimmerian[3] desert ever dwell.

But come, thou Goddess fair and free,
In Heav'n ycleped Euphrosynè,
And by men, heart-easing Mirth;
Whom lovely Venus, at a birth,
With two sister Graces more,
To ivy-crownèd Bacchus bore:
Or whether (as some sager sing)
The frolic wind that breathes the spring,
Zephyr, with Aurora playing,
As he met her once a-maying;
There on beds of violets blue,
And fresh-blown roses washed in dew,
Filled her with thee a daughter fair,
So buxom, blithe and debonair.

[1] The three-headed dog that guarded the entrance to the infernal regions. [2] His kennel.
[3] The Cimmerians of Homer ("Odyssey," xi. 14) lived in a land of perpetual darkness

Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful Jollity,
Quips, and cranks, and wanton wiles,
Nods, and becks, and wreathèd smiles,
Such as hang on Hebè's[1] cheek,
And love to live in dimples sleek ;
Sport that wrinkled Care derides,
And Laughter holding both his sides.
Come, and trip it, as you go,
On the light fantastic toe ;
And in thy right hand lead with thee
The mountain-nymph sweet Liberty ;
And, if I give thee honour due,
Mirth, admit me of thy crew,
To live with her, and live with thee,
In unreprovèd pleasures free ;
To hear the lark begin his flight,
And singing startle the dull night,
From his watch-tow'r in the skies,
Till the dappled dawn doth rise ;
Then to come, in spite of sorrow,
And at my window bid good morrow,
Through the sweet-briar, or the vine,
Or the twisted eglantine :
While the cock, with lively din,
Scatters the rear of Darkness thin ;
And to the stack, or the barn-door,
Stoutly struts his dames before :
Oft list'ning how the hounds and horn
Cheerly rouse the slumb'ring morn,
From the side of some hoar hill,
Through the high wood echoing shrill :
Some time walking, not unseen,
By hedge-row elms, on hillocks green,
Right against the eastern gate

[1] The goddess of youth

Where the great Sun begins his state,
Robed in flames and amber light,
The clouds in thousand liv'ries dight ;
While the ploughman, near at hand,
Whistles o'er the furrowed land,
And the milkmaid singeth blithe,
And the mower whets his sithe,
And ev'ry shepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorn in the dale.
Straight mine eye hath caught new pleasures,
Whilst the landskip round it measures ;
Russet lawns and fallows gray,
Where the nibbling flocks do stray ;
Mountains, on whose barren breast
The lab'ring clouds do often rest ;
Meadows trim with daisies pied,
Shallow brooks, and rivers wide :
Tow'rs and battlements it sees
Bosomed high in tufted trees,
Where perhaps some beauty lies,
The Cynosure of neighb'ring eyes.
Hard by, a cottage chimney smokes
From betwixt two aged oaks,
Where Corydon and Thyrsis,[1] met,
Are at their sav'ry dinner set
Of herbs, and other country messes,
Which the neat-handed Phillis[1] dresses ;
And then in haste her bow'r she leaves,
With Thestylis[1] to bind the sheaves ;
Or, if the earlier season lead,
To the tanned haycock in the mead.
Sometimes with secure delight
The upland hamlets will invite,
When the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebecks sound

[1] Stock-names of rustics in classical pastoral poetry.

To many a youth, and many a maid,
Dancing in the chequered shade ;
And young and old come forth to play
On a sun-shine holy-day,
Till the live-long day-light fail :
Then to the spicy nut-brown ale,
With stories told of many a feat,
How fairy Mab the junkets eat ;
She was pinched, and pulled, she said ;
And he, by friar's lantern led, [1]
Tells how the drudging Goblin [2] swet,
To earn his cream-bowl duly set,
When in one night, ere glimpse of morn,
His shad'wy flail hath threshed the corn,
That ten day-lab'rers could not end ;
Then lies him down the lubbar fiend,
And, stretched out all the chimney's length,
Basks at the fire his hairy strength ;
And crop-full out of doors he flings,
Ere the first cock his matin rings.
Thus done the tales, to bed they creep,
By whisp'ring winds soon lulled asleep.
Towered cities please us then,
And the busy hum of men,
Where throngs of knights and barons bold,
In weeds of peace, high triumphs hold,
With store of ladies, whose bright eyes
Rain influence, and judge the prize
Of wit or arms, while both contend
To win her grace, whom all commend.
There let Hymen [3] oft appear
In saffron robe, with taper clear,

[1] Jack o' Lantern, or Will o' the Wisp, a familiar figure in popular superstition.
[2] Robin Goodfellow, Shakespeare's Puck. Naturally mischievous, he could still be induced to perform various domestic tasks by a small present, such as a bowl of cream. [3] The god of marriage.

And pomp, and feast, and revelry,
With mask, and antique pageantry :
Such sights as youthful poets dream
On summer eves by haunted stream.
Then to the well-trod stage anon,
If Jonson's learnèd sock[1] be on,
Or sweetest Shakspeare, Fancy's child,
Warble his native wood-notes wild.
And ever, against eating cares,
Lap me in soft Lydian airs,[2]
Married to immortal verse ;
Such as the meeting soul may pierce,
In notes, with many a winding bout
Of linkèd sweetness long drawn out,
With wanton heed and giddy cunning ;
The melting voice through mazes running,
Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony ;
That Orpheus' self may heave his head
From golden slumber on a bed
Of heaped Elysian flow'rs, and hear
Such strains as would have won the ear
Of Pluto, to have quite set free
His half-regained Eurydicè.[3]
These delights if thou canst give,
Mirth, with thee I mean to live.

With the enchanting melody of this poem in our ears, and with its main outlines well in mind, we pass on at once to its companion piece.

[1] The low shoe worn by actors in comedy, as the high-heeled buskin, or "cothurnus," was used by actors in tragedy.
[2] Lydian music was proverbially tender and voluptuous.
[3] The story of Orpheus and Eurydice will be found in any classical dictionary.

IL PENSEROSO

Hence, vain deluding Joys,
The brood of Folly without father bred !
How little you bestead,
Or fill the fixèd mind with all your toys !
Dwell in some idle brain,
And fancies fond with gaudy shapes possess,
As thick and numberless
As the gay motes that people the sun-beams ;
Or likest hovering dreams,
The fickle pensioners [1] of Morpheus' train.
But hail, thou Goddess, sage and holy,
Hail, divinest Melancholy !
Whose saintly visage is too bright
To hit the sense of human sight,
And therefore to our weaker view
O'erlaid with black, staid Wisdom's hue ;
Black, but such as in esteem
Prince Memnon's [2] sister might beseem,
Or that starred Ethiop queen [3] that strove
To set her beauty's praise above
The Sea-Nymphs', and their pow'rs offended :
Yet thou art higher far descended :
Thee, bright-haired Vesta, long of yore,
The solitary Saturn bore ;
His daughter she,—in Saturn's reign,
Such mixture was not held a stain— ;
Oft in glimmering bow'rs and glades
He met her, and in secret shades
Of woody Ida's inmost grove,
Whilst yet there was no fear of Jove.

[1] Attendants; cp. "Midsummer Night's Dream," ii. 1.
[2] A handsome Ethiopian prince, slain by Achilles. See "Odyssey," xi. 522.
[3] Cassiopeia, who challenged the Nereids to a trial of beauty, and was transformed into the constellation known by her name.

Come, pensive Nun, devout and pure,
Sober, stedfast, and demure,
All in a robe of darkest grain,
Flowing with majestic train,
And sable stole of cyprus lawn,
Over thy decent shoulders drawn.
Come, but keep thy wonted state,
With even step, and musing gait ;
And looks commèrcing with the skies,
Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes :
There, held in holy passion still,
Forget thyself to marble, till
With a sad leaden downward cast
Thou fix them on the earth as fast.
And join with thee calm Peace, and Quiet,
Spare Fast, that oft with gods doth diet,
And hears the Muses in a ring
Aye round about Jove's altar sing :
And add to these retirèd Leisure,
That in trim gardens takes his pleasure :
But first, and chiefest, with thee bring,
Him that yon soars on golden wing,
Guiding the fiery-wheelèd throne,
The cherub Contemplatiön ; [1]
And the mute Silence hist along,
'Less Philomel will deign a song,
In her sweetest saddest plight,
Smoothing the rugged brow of night,
While Cynthia checks her dragon yoke,
Gently o'er th' accustomed oak :
Sweet bird, that shunn'st the noise of folly
Most musical, most melancholy !
Thee, chauntress, oft, the woods among,
I woo, to hear thy even-song ;
And, missing thee, I walk unseen

[1] Cp. Ezekiel x., and "Paradise Lost," VI. 750-59.

On the dry smooth-shaven green,
To behold the wand'ring moon,
Riding near her highest noon,
Like one that had been led astray
Through the heav'n's wide pathless way ;
And oft, as if her head she bowed,
Stooping through a fleecy cloud.
Oft, on a plat of rising ground,
I hear the far-off curfeu sound,
Over some wide-watered shore,
Swinging slow with sullen roar :
Or, if the air will not permit,
Some still removèd place will fit,
Where glowing embers through the room
Teach light to counterfeit a gloom ;
Far from all resort of mirth,
Save the cricket on the hearth,
Or the bellman's drowsy charm,
To bless the doors from nightly harm.
Or let my lamp, at midnight hour,
Be seen in some high lonely tow'r,
Where I may oft out-watch the Bear,[1]
With thrice-great Hermes,[2] or unsphere
The sp'rit of Plato,[3] to unfold
What worlds or what vast regions hold
Th' immortal mind that hath forsook
Her mansion in this fleshly nook :
And of those demons that are found
In fire, air, flood, or under ground,
Whose power hath a true consent
With planet, or with element.

[1] "As the Bear never sets, this implies that the student sits up till daybreak, when all stars disappear" (Keightley).

[2] The fabled Egyptian king, whom, on account of his universal knowledge and skill, the Greeks called "Trismegistus," or Thrice-great.

[3] To draw the spirit of Plato down from his heavenly sphere.

Sometime let gorgeous Tragedy
In sceptred pall come sweeping by,
Presenting Thebes,[1] or Pelops' line,[2]
Or the tale of Troy divine ; [3]
Or what (though rare) of later age
Ennobled hath the buskined[4] stage.
But, O sad Virgin, that thy pow'r
Might raise Musæüs [5] from his bow'r !
Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing
Such notes as, warbled to the string,
Drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek,
And made Hell grant what Love did seek ![6]
Or call up him that left half-told
The story of Cambuscan bold,[7]
Of Camball, and of Algarsife,
And who had Canacè to wife,
That owned the virtuous ring and glass ;
And of the wond'rous horse of brass
On which the Tartar king did ride :
And if aught else great bards beside [8]
In sage and solemn tunes have sung,
Of turneys, and of trophies hung,
Of forests, and enchantments drear,
Where more is meant than meets the ear !
Thus, Night, oft see me in thy pale career
Till civil-suited Morn appear ;
Not tricked and frounced as she was wont
With the Attic boy [9] to hunt,

[1] Thebes, in Bœotia, the scene of Æschylus' "Seven against Thebes," Sophocles' "Œdipus the King" and "Antigone," and Euripides' "Bacchæ."
[2] Referring to the three tragedies (trilogy) of Æschylus on the murder of Agamemnon, a descendant of Pelops.
[3] Referring to various episodes in the history of the Siege of Troy, treated by the Greek dramatists. [4] See note to "L'Allegro," p. 50.
[5] A mythical Greek bard, said to have been the son of Orpheus.
[6] See "L'Allegro," p. 50.
[7] The reference is to Chaucer's fragmentary "Squire's Tale."
[8] As, e.g., Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser.
[9] Cephalus, loved by Eos (Aurora), the Dawn.

But kercheft in a comely cloud,
While rocking winds are piping loud,
Or ushered with a shower still,
When the gust hath blown his fill,
Ending on the rustling leaves,
With minute drops from off the eaves.
And, when the sun begins to fling
His flaring beams, me, Goddess, bring
To archèd walks of twilight groves,
And shadows brown, that Sylvan loves,
Of pine, or monumental oak,
Where the rude axe, with heavèd stroke,
Was never heard the Nymphs to daunt,
Or fright them from their hallowed haunt.
There in close covert by some brook,
Where no profaner eye may look,
Hide me from Day's garish eye,
While the bee with honied thigh,
That at her flow'ry work doth sing,
And the waters murmuring,
With such consort as they keep,
Entice the dewy-feathered Sleep ;
And let some strange mysterious Dream
Wave at his wings in aery stream
Of lively portraiture displayed,
Softly on my eye-lids laid.
And, as I wake, sweet music breathe
Above, about or underneath,
Sent by some sp'rit to mortals good,
Or th' unseen Genius of the wood.
  But let my due feet never fail
To walk the studious cloister's pale,
And love the high-embowèd roof,
With antic pillars massy proof,
And storied windows richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light :

There let the pealing organ blow,
To the full-voiced quire below,
In service high and anthems clear,
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all Heav'n before mine eyes.
And may at last my weary age
Find out the peaceful hermitage,
The hairy gown and mossy cell,
Where I may sit and rightly spell
Of ev'ry star that heav'n doth show,
And ev'ry herb that sips the dew ;
Till old experience do attain
To something like prophetic strain.
These pleasures, Melancholy, give,
And I with thee will choose to live.

It will be noticed as curious that in both the foregoing poems Milton's mind turns naturally to the drama—to Shakespeare and Jonson in the one case, and to the great masters of Attic tragedy in the other. That at this time he was deeply interested in dramatic literature is further attested by the fact that his next production was in dramatic form—not indeed in the form of the regular stage-play, but in that of the private representation, combining dialogue, action, music, and pageantry, which was called the Masque. In his "Arcades : Part of an Entertainment presented to the Countess Dowager of Derby by some Noble Persons of her Family," he had already tried his hand in work of this kind. But this was slight and experimental. Shortly afterward came the masterpiece which

we know by the name of "Comus"—the name given to it after Milton's death—but which was by him simply entitled "A Masque presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634, before the Earl of Bridgewater, the President of Wales."

The circumstances of its composition and production are extremely interesting. The musical tastes which Milton had inherited from his father naturally brought him into association with others who loved and practised the art. Among these was a young man named Henry Lawes, at that time already well known as an accomplished musician, and later the most famous English composer of his time. The affection between the two appears to have originated in boyhood, when, it is conjectured, Lawes may have been a visitor at the house in Bread Street, and the following sonnet, dated February 1645, shows that it remained unabated in middle life, despite the political differences which in the meanwhile had driven the friends into opposite camps.

TO MR. H. LAWES, ON HIS AIRS

Harry, whose tuneful and well-measured song
First taught our English music how to scan
Words with just note and accent, not to scan
With Midas' ears, committing short and long;
Thy worth and skill exempts thee from the throng,
With praise enough for Envy to look wan;
To after age thou shalt be writ the man
That with smooth air couldst humour best our tongue.

Thou honour'st Verse, and Verse must lend her wing
To honour thee, the priest of Phœbus' quire,
That tun'st their happiest lines in hymn, or story.
Dante shall give Fame leave to set thee high'r
Than his Casella, whom he wooed to sing,
Met in the milder shades of Purgatory.[1]

Now Lawes was teaching music to the children of John Egerton, Earl of Bridgewater, at the time of that nobleman's appointment to the Lord Presidency of Wales and the Marches. It was in 1633 that the Earl took up his official residence at Ludlow Castle, in Shropshire; and, after the fashion of the age, it was decided to celebrate the event by private festivities on a scale of great magnificence, a chief feature of which was to be a masque. Lawes was entrusted with all the arrangements; he, of course, undertook the musical portions of the dramatic performance; he invited his friend Milton to provide the necessary framework and poetry; and the writing of "Comus" was the result.

The readiness with which he executed the task is once more signal proof of Milton's complete freedom from the narrowness and fanaticism of the Puritan zealots. Whatever its origin and early history, the masque as a dramatic type was largely the product of those Italian influences which from the time of the Renaissance onward had done so much to shape

[1] Casella was a Florentine friend of Dante, celebrated for his skill in music. Dante meets him in the second canto of the "Purgatorio," and induces him to sing.

and colour our imaginative literature. Many of our professional dramatic writers, notably Fletcher and Jonson, had employed it with admirable effect ; by the opening of the seventeenth century its popularity at court and in aristocratic circles was enormous. A number of reasons thus combined to render it as hateful to the Puritan bigot as even the regular stage-play itself. Yet Milton was willing to use it. That is a point upon which the utmost stress should be laid. A single detail will serve to make its significance clear. In 1633—the very year before the production of "Comus"—the famous Puritan William Prynne published a volume entitled "Histrio-Mastix, or Actor's Tragœdie." In this prodigious work of one thousand and six closely printed pages no fewer than four thousand texts of Scripture are cited to prove the absolute sinfulness of all stage-plays, including private theatricals, which are made the object of specially virulent abuse. The coincidence in time between Prynne's book and Milton's poem is certainly striking. Hardly had the violent controversialist delivered his sweeping attack before the great poet gave proof that one of the forms which had been savagely denounced as hopelessly vile could be turned to the service of the highest and purest moral teaching.

The special interest of "Comus" as marking another stage in the development of Milton's mind will now be apparent. Its literary affiliations are entirely with the Renaissance ;

as a piece of art, it belongs to the dramatic traditions of Peele, Fletcher, and Jonson, whom Milton had, it is clear, carefully and lovingly studied, and to all of whom he was more or less indebted for suggestions. Yet though the old form is maintained, the spirit which it embodies is new. No reader of "Comus" can fail to be impressed by the evidence which it affords of Milton's deepening seriousness. A note is struck which is far more nearly the real Puritan note than we have as yet anywhere heard in his work. A strenuous moral purpose lies at the very core of the action. Conception and details alike are filled with a splendid passion for righteousness. The simple story (plot it can hardly be called) of the lady lost in the dark wood, lured away by Comus and his band, and rescued by her brothers with the help of an attendant spirit and a river nymph, is a patent allegory of virtue, unharmed amid all dangers, invincible amid all trials, overcoming all temptations through its inherent might and the support in dire necessity of never-failing divine aid. Faith in the ultimate triumph of good pervades the poem, and finds full utterance in the magnificent outburst in which the Elder Brother declares that virtue is eternal and evil self-consuming, and that the very foundations of the universe are bound up with that supreme fact. In the contrast of principles and ideals which the movement of the action involves, it must also be remembered that Milton was writing with his thought upon the conditions of his

time; for while Comus and his crew of insolent revellers represent the growing license of Charles's profligate court and fashionable society, the lady and her brothers are set forward as types of the sobriety and temperance of the true religious life. In the brothers in particular we may see Milton's ideal of Puritanism as it was then conceived by him; an ideal large, generous, humane, combining love of divine philosophy and knowledge with zeal for holiness, and yet pointing to the spirit of holiness always as the overruling and unifying power in life.

To such high uses, then, did Milton's moral spirit bend one of the popular forms of Renaissance art, and the classical learning which he naturally incorporated in it. What we have called the Hellenic and the Hebraic elements in his work are now clearly beginning to change their relative proportions; for while the vehicle adopted shows the persistence of his Hellenism, the matter and purpose exhibit the growth of his Hebraism. This is a point to which the closest attention should be given.

Let me add that it will lend a fresh interest to "Comus" if in reading we also keep the purely personal aspects of it well in mind. We should remember that the principal actors were the Earl's children, that the two brothers were represented by little Viscount Brackley, aged twelve, and Thomas Egerton, aged eleven, and the heroine by Lady Alice Egerton, a beautiful girl of between fourteen and fifteen. The charming compliments to the young lady and

the two boys cleverly introduced in Comus's speeches beginning "Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould," and "Two such I saw," will thus be better understood, and a new meaning will be found in the closing scene, in which the children are presented to their father and mother with words of no idle flattery. Lawes himself played the part of the Attendant Spirit; and when this Spirit is pointedly praised for the beauty and power of his music (as in the passages beginning "Who with his soft pipe and smooth-dittied song," and "Thyrsis! whose artful strains have oft delayed"), we may be sure that his friend the poet intended the audience to take these words as referring to the musician himself as much as to his assumed character.

COMUS: A MASK

PERSONS

The Attendant Spirit, *afterwards in the habit of* Thyrsis;
Comus, *with his crew;*
The Lady;
First Brother;
Second Brother;
Sabrina, *the Nymph.*

The first Scene discovers a wild Wood. The Attendant Spirit *descends or enters*

Before the starry threshold of Jove's court
My mansion is, where those immortal shapes
Of bright aëreal spirits live insphered

In regions mild of calm and serene air,
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot,
Which men call Earth ; and, with low-thoughted care
Confined and pestered in this pinfold here,
Strive to keep up a frail and fev'rish being,
Unmindful of the crown that Virtue gives,
After this mortal change, to her true servants,
Amongst the enthronèd gods on sainted seats.
Yet some there be, that by due steps aspire
To lay their just hands on that golden key,
That opes the palace of Eternity :
To such my errand is ; and, but for such,
I would not soil these pure ambrosial weeds
With the rank vapours of this sin-worn mould.
But to my task. Neptune, besides the sway
Of ev'ry salt flood and each ebbing stream,
Took in by lot 'twixt high and nether Jove [1]
Imperial rule of all the sea-girt isles,
That like to rich and various gems, inlay
The unadornèd bosom of the deep ;
Which he, to grace his tributary gods,
By course commits to several government,
And gives them leave to wear their sapphire crowns,
And wield their little tridents ; but this Isle,
The greatest and the best of all the main,
He quarters to his blue-haired deities ;
And all this tract that fronts the falling sun
A noble peer of mickle trust and pow'r
Has in his charge, with tempered awe to guide
An old and haughty nation, proud in arms ;
Where his fair offspring nursed in princely lore,
Are coming to attend their father's state,
And new-intrusted sceptre ; but their way
Lies through the perplexed paths of this drear wood,

[1] In the division of the earth, Pluto or Hades obtained the Nether regions; he was hence called "Infernal Zeus," or "Nether Jove."

The nodding horrour of whose shady brows
Threats the forlorn and wand'ring passenger ;
And here their tender age might suffer peril,
But that by quick command from sovran Jove
I was despatched for their defence and guard :
And listen why ; for I will tell ye now
What never yet was heard in tale or song,
From old or modern bard, in hall or bow'r.
Bacchus,[1] that first from out the purple grape
Crushed the sweet poison of misusèd wine,
After the Tuscan mariners transformed,
Coasting the Tyrrhene shore, as the winds listed,
On Circè's island fell (who knows not Circe,
The daughter of the Sun, whose charmèd cup
Whoever tasted lost his upright shape,
And downward fell into a grov'ling swine ?)
This Nymph, that gazed upon his clust'ring locks
With ivy berries wreathed, and his blithe youth,
Had by him, ere he parted thence, a son
Much like his father, but his mother more,
Whom therefore she brought up, and Comus named ;[2]
Who, ripe and frolic of his full-grown age,
Roving the Celtic and Iberian fields,
At last betakes him to this om'nous wood ;
And in thick shelter of black shades imbow'red,
Excels his mother at her mighty art,
Off'ring to ev'ry weary traveller
His orient liquour in a crystal glass,
To quench the drouth of Phœbus ; which as they taste
(For most do taste through fond intemp'rate thirst),
Soon as the potion works, their human count'nance,
Th' express resemblance of the gods, is changed

[1] The genealogy which follows, like those in "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," is Milton's invention.
[2] Comus was the god of revelry and riot. He had appeared in English masques before Milton introduced him here.

Into some brutish form of wolf, or bear,
Or ounce, or tiger, hog, or bearded goat,
All other parts remaining as they were ;
And they, so perfect is their misery,
Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,
But boast themselves more comely than before ;
And all their friends and native home forget,
To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty.
Therefore when any favoured of high Jove
Chances to pass through this advent'rous glade,
Swift as the sparkle of a glancing star
I shoot from heav'n, to give him safe convoy,
As now I do. But first I must put off
These my sky robes spun out of Iris' woof,
And take the weeds and likeness of a swain
That to the service of this house belongs,
Who with his soft pipe and smooth-dittied song,
Well knows to still the wild winds when they roar,
And hush the waving woods ; nor of less faith,
And in this office of his mountain watch
Likeliest, and nearest to the present aid
Of this occasion. But I hear the tread
Of hateful steps ; I must be viewless now.

Comus *enters, with a charming-rod in one hand, his glass in the other ; with him a rout of monsters, headed like sundry sorts of wild beasts, but otherwise like men and women, their apparel glistering ; they come in making a riotous and unruly noise, with torches in their hands*

Comus. The star that bids the shepherd fold
Now the top of heav'n doth hold ;
And the gilded car of Day
His glowing axle doth allay
In the steep Atlantic stream ;

And the slope Sun his upward beam
Shoots against the dusky pole,
Pacing toward the other goal
Of his chamber in the east.
Meanwhile welcome Joy, and Feast,
Midnight Shout, and Revelry,
Tipsy Dance, and Jollity.
Braid your locks with rosy twine,
Dropping odours, dropping wine.
Rigour now is gone to bed,
And Advice with scrup'lous head.
Strict Age and sour Severity,
With their grave saws, in slumber lie,
We that are of purer fire,
Imitate the starry quire,
Who, in their nightly watchful spheres,
Lead in swift round the months and years.
The sounds and seas, with all their finny drove,
Now to the moon in wav'ring morrice move ;
And, on the tawny sands and shelves,
Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves.
By dimpled brook and fountain-brim,
The Wood-Nymphs, decked with daisies trim,
Their merry wakes and pastimes keep.
What hath Night to do with Sleep ?
Night hath better sweets to prove ;
Venus now wakes, and wakens Love.
Come, let us our rites begin ;
'Tis only daylight that makes sin,
Which these dun shades will ne'er report.—
Hail, Goddess of nocturnal sport,
Dark-veiled Cotytto ! [1] to whom the secret flame
Of midnight torches burns ! Mysterious dame,
That ne'er art called but when the dragon womb

[1] A Thracian goddess who was worshipped at night with licentious rites.

Of Stygian darkness spets her thickest gloom,
And makes one blot of all the air,
Stay thy cloudy ebon chair,
Wherein thou rid'st with Hecate,[1] and befriend
Us thy avowed priests, till utmost end
Of all thy dues be done and none left out;
Ere the blabbing eastern scout,
The nice Morn, on the Indian steep
From her cabined loop-hole peep,
And to the tell-tale sun descry
Our concealed solemnity.—
Come, knit hands, and beat the ground
In a light fantastic round.

The measure

Break off, break off, I feel the diff'rent pace
Of some chaste footing near about this ground.
Run to your shrouds, within these brakes and trees;
Our number may affright: some virgin sure
(For so I can distinguish by mine art)
Benighted in these woods. Now to my charms,
And to my wily trains; I shall ere long
Be well stocked with as fair a herd as grazed
About my mother Circè. Thus I hurl
My dazzling spells into the spungy air,
Of pow'r to cheat the eye with blear illusion,
And give it false presentments, lest the place
And my quaint habits breed astonishment,
And put the damsel to suspicious flight,
Which must not be, for that's against my course:
I, under fair pretence of friendly ends,
And well-placed words of glozing courtesy
Baited with reasons not unplausible,
Wind me into the easy-hearted man,

[1] A goddess of night, the under-world, and magic.

And hug him into snares. When once her eye
Hath met the virtue of this magic dust,
I shall appear some harmless villager,
Whom thrift keeps up about his country gear.[1]
But here she comes ; I fairly step aside,
And hearken, if I may, her business here.

Enter the Lady

Lady. This way the noise was, if mine ear be true,
My best guide now. Methought it was the sound
Of riot and ill-managed merriment,
Such as the jocund flute or gamesome pipe
Stirs up among the loose unlettered hinds,
When for their teeming flocks and granges full,
In wanton dance they praise the bounteous Pan,
And thank the gods amiss. I should be loth
To meet the rudeness and swilled insolence
Of such late wassailers ; yet oh, where else
Shall I inform my unacquainted feet
In the blind mazes of this tangled wood ?
My brothers, when they saw me wearied out
With this long way, resolving here to lodge
Under the spreading favour of these pines,
Stepped, as they said, to the next thicket-side,
To bring me berries, or such cooling fruit
As the kind hospitable woods provide.
They left me then when the grey-hooded Ev'n,
Like a sad votarist in palmer's weed,
Rose from the hindmost wheels of Phœbus' wain ;
But where they are, and why they came not back,
Is now the labour of my thoughts ; 'tis likeliest
They had engaged their wand'ring steps too far,
And envious Darkness, ere they could return,
Had stole them from me : else, O thievish Night,

[1] Business.

Why shouldst thou, but for some felonious end,
In thy dark lantern thus close up the stars,
That Nature hung in heav'n, and filled their lamps
With everlasting oil, to give due light
To the misled and lonely traveller ?
This is the place, as well as I may guess,
Whence even now the tumult of loud mirth
Was rife and perfect in my list'ning ear ;
Yet nought but single darkness do I find.
What might this be ? A thousand fantasies
Begin to throng into my memory,
Of calling shapes, and beck'ning shadows dire,
And aery tongues that syllable men's names
On sands, and shores, and desert wildernesses.
These thoughts may startle well, but not astound
The virtuous mind, that ever walks attended
By a strong siding champion, Conscience.—
Oh, welcome, pure-eyed Faith, white-handed Hope,
Thou hov'ring Angel, girt with golden wings,
And thou, unblemished form of Chastity !
I see ye visibly, and now believe
That He, the Supreme Good, to whom all things ill
Are but as slavish officers of vengeance,
Would send a glist'ring guardian, if need were,
To keep my life and honour unassailed.
Was I deceived, or did a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night ?
I did not err ; there does a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night,
And casts a gleam over this tufted grove :
I cannot halloo to my brothers, but
Such noise as I can make to be heard farthest
I'll venture, for my new-enlivened spirits
Prompt me ; and they perhaps are not far off.

SONG

Sweet Echo, sweetest Nymph, that liv'st unseen
Within thy aery shell,
By slow Meander's margent green,
And in the violet-embroidered vale,
Where the love-lorn nightingale
Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well ;
Canst thou not tell me of a gentle pair
That likest thy Narcissus are ?
Oh, if thou have
Hid them in some flow'ry cave,
Tell me but where,
Sweet Queen of parley, Daughter of the Sphere !
So mayst thou be translated to the skies,
And give resounding grace to all Heav'n's harmonies !

Comus *enters*

Comus. Can any mortal mixture of Earth's mould
Breathe such divine enchanting ravishment ?
Sure something holy lodges in that breast,
And with these raptures moves the vocal air
To testify his hidden residence.
How sweetly did they float upon the wings
Of silence, through the empty-vaulted night,
At ev'ry fall smoothing the raven-down
Of Darkness, till it smiled ! I have oft heard
My mother Circè with the Sirens three,
Amidst the flow'ry-kirtled Naiades,
Culling their potent herbs and baleful drugs ;
Who, as they sung, would take the prisoned soul,
And lap it in Elysium : Scylla wept,
And chid her barking waves [1] into attention,
And fell Charybdis murmured soft applause :

[1] Virgil's "Multis circum latrantibus undis," "Æneid," vii. 588.

Yet they in pleasing slumber lulled the sense,
And in sweet madness robbed it of itself ;
But such a sacred and home-felt delight,
Such sober certainty of waking bliss,
I never heard till now.—I'll speak to her,
And she shall be my queen.—Hail, Foreign Wonder !
Whom certain these rough shades did never breed,
Unless the goddess that in rural shrine
Dwell'st here with Pan, or Sylvan, by blest song
Forbidding ev'ry bleak, unkindly fog
To touch the prosp'rous growth of this tall wood.

Lady. Nay, gentle Shepherd, ill is lost that praise
That is addressed to unattending ears ;
Not any boast of skill but extreme shift,
How to regain my severed company,
Compelled me to awake the courteous Echo
To give me answer from her mossy couch.

Comus. What chance, good Lady, hath bereft you thus ?

Lady. Dim darkness, and this leafy labyrinth.

Comus. Could that divide you from near-ush'ring guides ?

Lady. They left me weary on a grassy turf.

Comus. By falsehood, or discourtesy, or why ?

Lady. To seek i' the valley some cool, friendly spring.

Comus. And left your fair side all unguarded, Lady ?

Lady. They were but twain, and purposed quick return.

Comus. Perhaps forestalling Night prevented them.

Lady. How easy my misfortune is to hit !

Comus. Imports their loss, besides the present need ?

Lady. No less than if I should my brothers lose.

Comus. Were they of manly prime, or youthful bloom?

Lady. As smooth as Hebè's their unrazored lips.

Comus. Two such I saw, what time the laboured ox
In his loose traces from the furrow came,
And the swinked [1] hedger at his supper sat;
I saw them under a green mantling vine,
That crawls along the side of yon small hill,
Plucking ripe clusters from the tender shoots;
Their port was more than human as they stood;
I took it for a faëry vision
Of some gay creatures of the element,
That in the colours of the rainbow live,
And play i' the plighted clouds: I was awestruck,
And, as I passed, I worshipped; if those you seek,
It were a journey like the path to Heav'n,
To help you find them.

Lady. Gentle Villager,
What readiest way would bring me to that place?

Comus. Due west it rises from this shrubby point.

Lady. To find out that, good Shepherd, I suppose,
In such a scant allowance of star-light,
Would overtask the best land-pilot's art,
Without the sure guess of well-practised feet.

Comus. I know each lane, and ev'ry alley green,
Dingle, or bushy dell of this wild wood,
And ev'ry bosky bourn from side to side,
My daily walks and ancient neighbourhood;
And if your stray attendants be yet lodged,
Or shroud within these limits, I shall know
Ere morrow wake, or the low-roosted lark
From her thatched pallet rouse; if otherwise
I can conduct you, Lady, to a low

[1] Tired out with labour.

But loyal cottage, where you may be safe
Till further quest.
Lady. Shepherd, I take thy word,
And trust thy honest offered courtesy,
Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds
With smoky rafters, than in tap'stry halls
In courts of princes, where it first was named,
And yet is most pretended : in a place
Less warranted than this, or less secure,
I cannot be, that I should fear to change it.—
Eye me, blest Providence, and square my trials
To my proportioned strength !—Shepherd, lead on.
They go out.

The two Brothers *enter*

Elder B. Unmuffle, ye faint Stars ; and thou, fair Moon,
That wont'st to love the traveller's benison,
Stoop thy pale visage through an amber cloud,
And disinherit Chaos, that reigns here
In double night of darkness and of shades ;
Or, if your influence be quite dammed up
With black usurping mists, some gentle taper,
Though a rush-candle from the wicker hole
Of some clay habitation, visit us
With thy long-levelled rule of streaming light ;
And thou shalt be our Star of Arcady,
Or Tyrian Cynosure.[1]
Sec. B. Or, if our eyes
Be barred that happiness, might we but hear
The folded flocks penned in their wattled cotes,
Or sound of past'ral reed with oaten stops,
Or whistle from the lodge, or village cock
Count the night watches to his feath'ry dames ;

[1] The constellation of the Lesser Bear (" Dog's Tail "), by which the Tyrian, or Phœnician, sailors steered their course.

'Twould be some solace yet, some little cheering,
In this close dungeon of innum'rous boughs.
But oh, that hapless virgin, our lost sister,
Where may she wander now, whither betake her
From the chill dew, among rude burs and thistles?
Perhaps some cold bank is her bolster now,
Or 'gainst the rugged bark of some broad elm
Leans her unpillowed head, fraught with sad fears.
What if in wild amazement and affright?
Or, while we speak, within the direful grasp
Of savage hunger, or of savage heat?

Elder B. Peace, Brother; be not over-exquisite
To cast the fashion of uncertain evils:
For grant they be so, while they rest unknown,
What need a man forestall his date of grief,
And run to meet what he would most avoid?
Or if they be but false alarms of fear,
How bitter is such self-delusion!
I do not think my sister so to seek,
Or so unprincipled in Virtue's book,
And the sweet peace that goodness bosoms ever,
As that the single want of light and noise
(Not being in danger, as I trust she is not),
Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts,
And put them into misbecoming plight.
Virtue could see to do what Virtue would
By her own radiant light, though sun and moon
Were in the flat sea sunk. And Wisdom's self
Oft seeks to sweet retirèd solitude,
Where, with her best nurse, Contemplation,
She plumes her feathers and lets grow her wings,
That in the various bustle of resort
Were all to-ruffled,[1] and sometimes impaired.
He, that has light within his own clear breast,

[1] The prefix "to" increased the force of the verb. Cp. Judges ix. 53.

May sit i' the centre, and enjoy bright day ;
But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts,
Benighted walks under the mid-day sun :
Himself is his own dungeon.
Sec B. 'Tis most true,
That musing Meditation most affects
The pensive secrecy of desert cell,
Far from the cheerful haunt of men and herds,
And sits as safe as in a senate house :
For who would rob a hermit of his weeds,
His few books, or his beads, or maple dish,
Or do his gray hairs any violence ?
But Beauty, like the fair Hesperian tree [1]
Laden with blooming gold, had need the guard
Of dragon-watch with unenchanted eye,
To save her blossoms and defend her fruit
From the rash hand of bold Incontinence.
You may as well spread out the unsunned heaps
Of miser's treasure by an outlaw's den,
And tell me it is safe, as bid me hope
Danger will wink on opportunity,
And let a single helpless maiden pass
Uninjured in this wild surrounding waste.
Of night, or loneliness, it recks me not ;
I fear the dread events that dog them both,
Lest some ill-greeting touch attempt the person
Of our unowned sister.
Elder B. I do not, Brother,
Infer, as if I thought my sister's state
Secure, without all doubt or controversy ;
Yet, where an equal poise of hope and fear
Does arbitrate th' event, my nature is
That I incline to hope, rather than fear,

[1] The golden apples which Hera (Juno) received among her wedding gifts were placed by her in charge of three nymphs, named Hesperides, and the dragon Ladon.

And gladly banish squint suspicion.
My sister is not so defenceless left
As you imagine ; she has a hidden strength,
Which you remember not.
Sec. B. What hidden strength,
Unless the strength of Heav'n, if you mean that ?
Elder B. I mean that too, but yet a hidden strength
Which, if Heav'n gave it, may be termed her own :
'Tis Chastity, my Brother, Chastity :
She, that has that, is clad in complete steel,
And, like a quivered nymph with arrows keen,
May trace huge forests, and unharboured heaths,
Infamous hills, and sandy per'lous wilds,
Where, through the sacred rays of Chastity,
No savage fierce, bandite or mountaineer,
Will dare to soil her virgin purity :
Yea there, where very Desolation dwells,
By grots and caverns shagged with horrid shades,
She may pass on with unblenched majesty,
Be it not done in pride or in presumption.
Some say, no evil thing that walks by night,
In fog or fire, by lake or moorish fen,
Blue meagre hag, or stubborn unlaid ghost
That breaks his magic chains at curfeu time,
No goblin, or swart faery of the mine,
Hath hurtful pow'r o'er true virginity.
Do ye believe me yet, or shall I call
Antiquity from the old schools of Greece
To testify the arms of Chastity ?
Hence had the huntress Dian her dread bow,
Fair silver-shafted Queen, for ever chaste,
Wherewith she tamed the brinded lioness
And spotted mountain pard, but set at naught
The friv'lous bolt of Cupid ; gods and men
Feared her stern frown, and she was Queen o' th' woods.

What was that snaky-headed Gorgon shield
That wise Minerva wore, unconquered virgin,
Wherewith she freezed her foes to congealed stone,
But rigid looks of chaste austerity,
And noble grace, that dashed brute violence
With sudden adoration and blank awe?
So dear to Heav'n is saintly chastity,
That, when a soul is found sincerely so,
A thousand liv'ried Angels lackey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
And in clear dream and solemn vision
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear;
Till oft converse with Heav'nly habitants
Begin to cast a beam on th' outward shape,
The unpolluted temple of the mind,
And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,
Till all be made immortal. But when lust,
By unchaste looks, loose gestures and foul talk,
But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,
Lets in defilement to the inward parts,
The soul grows clotted by contagion,
Imbodies, and imbrutes, till she quite lose
The Divine property of her first being.
Such are those thick and gloomy shadows damp
Oft seen in charnel vaults and sepulchres
Ling'ring, and sitting by a new made grave,
As loth to leave the body that it loved,
And linked itself by carnal sensualty
To a degen'rate and degraded state.
Sec. B. How charming is Divine Philosophy!
Not harsh, and crabbèd, as dull fools suppose;
But musical as is Apollo's lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets,
Where no crude surfeit reigns.
Elder B. List, list; I hear
Some far-off halloo break the silent air.

Sec. B. Methought so too; what should it be?
Elder B. For certain
Either some one like us night-foundered here,
Or else some neighbour woodman, or, at worst,
Some roving robber calling to his fellows.
Sec. B. Heav'n keep my sister!—Again, again, and near!
Best draw, and stand upon our guard.
Elder B. I'll halloo;
If he be friendly, he comes well; if not,
Defence is a good cause, and Heav'n be for us!

The Attendant Spirit *enters, habited like a Shepherd*

That halloo I should know.—What are you? Speak;
Come not too near, you fall on iron stakes else.
Spirit. What voice is that? My young lord? Speak again.
Sec. B. O Brother, 'tis my father's shepherd, sure.
Elder B. Thyrsis? Whose artful strains have oft delayed
The huddling brook to hear its madrigal,
And sweetened ev'ry muskrose of the dale?
How cam'st thou here, good Swain? Hath any ram
Slipped from the fold, or young kid lost his dam,
Or straggling wether the pent flock forsook?
How couldst thou find this dark sequestered nook?
Spirit. O my loved master's Heir, and his next joy,
I came not here on such a trivial toy
As a strayed ewe, or to pursue the stealth
Of pilf'ring wolf; not all the fleecy wealth,
That doth enrich these downs, is worth a thought
To this my errand, and the care it brought.
But, oh, my virgin Lady, where is she?
How chance she is not in your company?

Elder B. To tell thee sadly, Shepherd, without blame
Or our neglect, we lost her as we came.
Spirit. Ay me unhappy ! Then my fears are true.
Elder B. What fears, good Thyrsis ? Prythee briefly show.
Spirit. I'll tell ye ; 'tis not vain or fabulous
(Though so esteemed by shallow ignorance),
What the sage poets, taught by th' Heav'nly Muse,
Storied of old, in high immortal verse,
Of dire chimeras, and enchanted isles,
And rifted rocks whose entrance leads to Hell ;
For such there be ; but unbelief is blind.
Within the navel of this hideous wood,
Immured in cypress shades a sorc'rer dwells,
Of Bacchus and of Circè born, great Comus,
Deep skilled in all his mother's witcheries ;
And here to ev'ry thirsty wanderer
By sly enticement gives his baneful cup,
With many murmurs mixed, whose pleasing poison
The visage quite transforms of him that drinks,
And th' inglorious likeness of a beast
Fixes instead, unmoulding Reason's mintage
Charactered in the face : this have I learnt
Tending my flocks hard by i' the hilly crofts,
That brow this bottom-glade ; whence night by night
He and his monstrous rout are heard to howl,
Like stabled wolves, or tigers at their prey,
Doing abhorrèd rites to Hecatè
In their obscurèd haunts of inmost bow'rs.
Yet have they many baits and guileful spells,
To inveigle and invite the unwary sense
Of them that pass unweeting by the way.
This ev'ning late, (by then the chewing flocks
Had ta'en their supper on the sav'ry herb
Of knot-grass dew-besprent, and were in fold),

I sat me down to watch upon a bank
With ivy canopied, and interwove
With flaunting honey-suckle, and began,
Wrapt in a pleasing fit of melancholy,
To meditate my rural minstrelsy,
Till fancy had her fill ; but, ere a close,
The wonted roar was up amidst the woods,
And filled the air with barb'rous dissonance ;
At which I ceased, and listened them awhile,
Till an unusual stop of sudden silence
Gave respite to the drowsy frighted steeds,
That draw the litter of close-curtained Sleep ;
At last a soft and solemn-breathing sound
Rose like a steam of rich distilled perfumes,
And stole upon the air, that ev'n Silence
Was took ere she was ware, and wished she might
Deny her nature, and be never more,
Still to be so displaced. I was all ear,
And took in strains that might create a soul
Under the ribs of Death : but oh, ere long,
Too well I did perceive it was the voice
Of my most honoured Lady, your dear sister.
Amazed I stood, harrowed with grief and fear,
And, oh poor hapless nightingale, thought I,
How sweet thou sing'st, how near the deadly
snare !
Then down the lawns I ran with headlong haste,
Through paths and turnings often trod by day ;
Till, guided by mine ear, I found the place
Where that damned wisard, hid in sly disguise,
(For so by certain signs I knew), had met
Already, ere my best speed could prevent,
The aidless innocent lady his wished prey,
Who gently asked if he had seen such two,
Supposing him some neighbour villager.
Longer I durst not stay, but soon I guessed

Ye were the two she meant ; with that I sprung
Into swift flight, till I had found you here ;
But further know I not.
Sec. B. O Night, and Shades !
How are ye joined with Hell in triple knot
Against the unarmed weakness of one virgin,
Alone, and helpless ! Is this the confidence
You gave me, Brother ?
Elder B. Yes, and keep it still ;
Lean on it safely ; not a period
Shall be unsaid for me. Against the threats
Of malice, or of sorc'ry, or that pow'r
Which erring men call Chance, this I hold firm :—
Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt,
Surprised by unjust force, but not enthralled ;
Yea, even that which Mischief meant most harm
Shall in the happy trial prove most glory ;
But evil on itself shall back recoil,
And mix no more with goodness ; when at last
Gathered like scum, and settled to itself,
It shall be in eternal restless change
Self-fed and self-consumed. If this fail,
The pillared firmament is rottenness,
And earth's base built on stubble.—But come let's on.
Against th' opposing Will and Arm of Heav'n
May never this just sword be lifted up !
But for that damned magician, let him be girt
With all the grisly legions that troop
Under the sooty flag of Acheron,
Harpies and Hydras, or all the monstrous forms
'Twixt Africa and Ind, I'll find him out,
And force him to restore his purchase[1] back,
Or drag him by the curls to a foul death,
Cursed as his life.

[1] This word is here used in its primary, etymological sense—what is stolen (French *pourchasser*).

Spirit. Alas, good vent'rous Youth,
I love thy courage yet, and bold emprise ;
But here thy sword can do thee little stead ;
Far other arms and other weapons must
Be those, that quell the might of hellish charms :
He with his bare wand can unthread thy joints,
And crumble all thy sinews.
Elder B. Why, prithee, Shepherd,
How durst thou then thyself approach so near,
As to make this relation ?
Spirit. Care, and utmost shifts,
How to secure the lady from surprisal,
Brought to my mind a certain shepherd lad,[1]
Of small regard to see to, yet well skilled
In ev'ry virtuous plant, and healing herb,
That spreads her verdant leaf to th' morning ray :
He loved me well, and oft would beg me sing ;
Which when I did, he on the tender grass
Would sit and hearken ev'n to ecstasy,
And in requital ope his leathern scrip,
And show me simples of a thousand names,
Telling their strange and vig'rous faculties.
Amongst the rest a small unsightly root,
But of divine effect, he culled me out ;
The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on't,
But in another country, as he said,
Bore a bright golden flow'r, but not in this soil :
Unknown, and like esteemed, and the dull swain
Treads on it daily with his clouted shoon :
And yet more med'cinal is it than that Moly,[2]
That Hermes once to wise Ulysses gave.
He called it Hæmony,[3] and gave it me,

[1] It is possible that the allusion is to Milton's friend, Charles Diodati, who was skilled in botany.
[2] The herb which protected Odysseus against Circe's sorceries See "Odyssey," x.
[3] Apparently, Milton's own invention. The word seems to be coined from Hæmonia, a name for Thrace, the land of magic.

And bade me keep it as of sovran use
'Gainst all enchantments, mildew, blast or damp,
Or ghastly furies' apparition.
I pursed it up, but little reck'ning made,
Till now that this extremity compelled :
But now I find it true ; for by this means
I knew the foul enchanter, though disguised,
Entered the very lime-twigs[1] of his spells,
And yet came off. If you have this about you
(As I will give you when we go), you may
Boldly assault the necromancer's Hall ;
Where if he be, with dauntless hardihood,
And brandished blade, rush on him ; break his glass,
And shed the luscious liquour on the ground,
But seize his Wand ; though he and his cursed crew
Fierce sign of battle make, and menace high,
Or like the sons of Vulcan vomit smoke,
Yet will they soon retire, if he but shrink.
Elder B. Thyrsis, lead on apace, I'll follow thee ;
And some good Angel bear a shield before us !

The Scene changes to a stately palace, set out with all manner of deliciousness ; soft music, tables spread with all dainties. Comus *appears with his rabble, and the* Lady *set in an enchanted chair, to whom he offers his glass, which she puts by, and goes about to rise*

Comus. Nay, Lady, sit ; if I but wave this Wand,
Your nerves are all chained up in alablaster,[2]
And you a statue or, as Daphnè was,
Root-bound,[3] that fled Apollo.
Lady. Fool, do not boast ;
Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind

[1] The reference is to bird-snaring.
[2] An old form of *alabaster*.
[3] Flying from Apollo, Daphne was changed into a laurel-tree.

With all thy charms, although this corp'ral rind
Thou hast immanacled, while Heav'n sees good.
Comus. Why are you vexed, Lady? Why do you frown?
Here dwell no frowns nor anger; from these gates
Sorrow flies far. See here be all the pleasures
That Fancy can beget on youthful thoughts,
When the fresh blood grows lively, and returns
Brisk as the April buds in primrose-seas'n.
And first, behold this cordial julep here,
That flames and dances in his crystal bounds,
With sp'rits of balm and fragrant syrops mixed:
Not that Nepenthes, which the wife of Thone
In Egypt gave to Jove-born Helena,
Is of such pow'r to stir up joy as this,
To life so friendly, or so cool to thirst.
Why should you be so cruel to yourself,
And to those dainty limbs, which Nature lent
For gentle usage and soft delicacy?
But you invert the cov'nants of her trust,
And harshly deal, like an ill borrower,
With that which you received on other terms,
Scorning the unexempt condition,
By which all mortal frailty must subsist,
Refreshment after toil, ease after pain,
That have been tired all day without repast,
And timely rest have wanted; but, fair Virgin,
This will restore all soon.
Lady. 'Twill not, false Traitor!
'Twill not restore the truth and honesty,
That thou hast banished from thy tongue with lies.
Was this the cottage and the safe abode,
Thou told'st me of? What grim aspects are these,
These ugly-headed monsters? Mercy guard me!
Hence with thy brewed enchantments, foul Deceiver!
Hast thou betrayed my cred'lous innocence

With visored falsehood and base forgery ?
And wouldst thou seek again to trap me here
With lickerish baits, fit to ensnare a brute ?
Were it a draught for Juno when she banquets,
I would not taste thy treas'nous offer ; none
But such as are good men can give good things ;
And that, which is not good, is not delicious
To a well-governed and wise appetite.

Comus. Oh, foolishness of men, that lend their ears
To those budge doctors of the Stoic fur,[1]
And fetch their precepts from the Cynic tub,[2]
Praising the lean and sallow Abstinence !
Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth
With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,
Cov'ring the earth with odours, fruits, and flocks,
Thronging the seas with spawn innum'rable,
But all to please and sate the curious taste ?
And set to work millions of spinning worms,
That in their green shops weave the smooth-haired silk,
To deck their sons ; and, that no corner might
Be vacant of her plenty, in her own loins
She hutched the all-worshipped ore, and precious gems,
To store her children with. If all the world
Should in a pet of temp'rance feed on pulse,
Drink the clear stream, and nothing wear but frieze,
Th' All-giver would be unthanked, would be unpraised,
Not half His riches known, and yet despised ;
And we should serve Him as a grudging master,
As a penurious niggard of His wealth ;
And live like Nature's bastards, not her sons,

[1] A disputed passage. "Budge" probably means surly. "Fur" alludes to the trimming of the scholastic gown of the English universities.

[2] The tub of Diogenes the Cynic.

Who would be quite surcharged with her own
weight,
And strangled with her waste fertility ;
Th' earth cumbered, and the winged air darked with
plumes,
The herds would over-multitude their lords,
The sea o'erfraught would swell, and th' unsought
diamonds
Would so imblaze the forehead of the deep,
And so bestud with stars, that they below
Would grow inured to light, and come at last
To gaze upon the sun with shameless brows.
List, Lady ; be not coy, and be not cozened
With that same vaunted name, Virginity.
Beauty is Nature's coin, must not be hoarded,
But must be current ; and the good thereof
Consists in mutual and partaken bliss,
Unsav'ry in the enjoyment of itself :
If you let slip time, like a neglected rose
It withers on the stalk with languished head.
Beauty is Nature's brag, and must be shown
In courts, at feasts and high solemnities,
Where most may wonder at the workmanship ;
It is for homely features to keep home,
They had their name thence ; coarse complexions,
And cheeks of sorry grain, will serve to ply
The sampler, and to tease the huswife's wool :
What need a vermeil-tinctured lip for that,
Love-darting eyes, or tresses like the Morn ?
There was another meaning in these gifts ;
Think what, and be advised ; you are but young
yet.

Lady. I had not thought to have unlocked my lips
In this unhallowed air, but that this juggler
Would think to charm my judgment, as mine eyes,
Obtruding false rules pranked in Reason's garb.

I hate when Vice can bolt [1] her arguments,
And Virtue has no tongue to check her pride.
Impostor, do not charge most innocent Nature,
As if she would her children should be riotous
With her abundance : she, good cateress,
Means her provision only to the good,
That live according to her sober laws,
And holy dictate of spare Temperance.
If ev'ry just man, that now pines with want,
Had but a mod'rate and beseeming share
Of that which lewdly-pampered Luxury
Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,
Nature's full blessings would be well dispensed
In unsuperfluous ev'n proportiön,
And she no whit incumbered with her store ;
And then the Giver would be better thanked,
His praise due paid : for swinish Gluttony
Ne'er looks to Heav'n amidst his gorgeous feast,
But with besotted, base ingratitude
Crams, and blasphemes his Feeder. Shall I go on ?
Or have I said enough ? To him that dares
Arm his profane tongue with contemptuous words
Against the sun-clad pow'r of Chastity
Fain would I something say ; yet to what end ?
Thou hast nor ear nor soul to apprehend
The sublime notion, and high mystery
That must be uttered to unfold the sage
And serious doctrine of virginity ;
And thou art worthy that thou shouldst not know
More happiness than this thy present lot.
Enjoy your dear wit and gay rhetoric,
That hath so well been taught her dazzling fence :
Thou art not fit to hear thyself convinced ;
Yet, should I try, the uncontrollèd worth
Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt sp'rits

[1] Sift, refine; as a bolting-mill sifts and refines flour.

To such a flame of sacred vehemence
That dumb things would be moved to sympathize,
And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and
shake,
Till all thy magic structures, reared so high,
Were shattered into heaps o'er thy false head.
Comus. She fables not : I feel that I do fear
Her words set off by some superior pow'r ;
And though not mortal, yet a cold shudd'ring dew
Dips me all o'er, as when the wrath of Jove
Speaks thunder, and the chains of Erebus,
To some of Saturn's crew.[1] I must dissemble,
And try her yet more strongly.—Come, no more !
This is mere moral babble, and direct
Against the canon-laws of our foundation.
I must not suffer this ; yet 'tis but the lees
And settlings of a melancholy blood.
But this will cure all straight ; one sip of this
Will bathe the drooping spirits in delight
Beyond the bliss of dreams. Be wise, and taste.—

The Brothers *rush in with swords drawn, wrest his glass out of his hand, and break it against the ground ; his rout make sign of resistance, but are all driven in. The* Attendant Spirit *comes in*

Spirit. What, have you let the false Enchanter
'scape ?
Oh, ye mistook, ye should have snatched his Wand,
And bound him fast ; without his rod reversed,
And backward mutters of dissev'ring pow'r,
We cannot free the Lady that sits here
In stony fetters fixed, and motionless.
—Yet stay, be not disturbed. Now I bethink me,

[1] An allusion to the ten-years contest between Zeus (Jupiter) and Chronos (Saturn) and his crew of Titans.

Some other means I have which may be used,
Which once of Melibœus[1] old I learnt,
The soothest shepherd that e'er piped on plains.
  There is a gentle Nymph not far from hence,
That with moist curb sways the smooth Severn
    stream,
Sabrina is her name, a virgin pure ;
Whilom she was the daughter of Locrine,
That had the sceptre from his father Brute.[2]
She, guiltless damsel, flying the mad pursuit
Of her enragèd stepdame Guendolen,
Commended her fair innocence to th' flood,
That stayed her flight with his cross-flowing course.
The Water-Nymphs, that in the bottom played,
Held up their pearlèd wrists, and took her in,
Bearing her straight to agèd Nereus' hall ;
Who, piteous of her woes, reared her lank head,
And gave her to his daughters to imbathe
In nectared lavers, strewed with asphodel ;
And through the porch and inlet of each sense
Dropped in ambrosial oils, till she revived,
And underwent a quick immortal change,
Made Goddess of the river : she still retains
Her maiden gentleness, and oft at eve
Visits the herds along the twilight meadows,
Helping all urchin blasts, and ill-luck signs
That the shrewd meddling elf delights to make,
Which she with precious vialed liquors heals ;
For which the shepherds at their festivals
Carol her goodness loud in rustic lays,
And throw sweet garland wreaths into her stream

[1] One of the speakers in Virgil's first Eclogue; but it is possible that the reference is to Spenser, who had told the story of Sabrina in the "Faery Queene," Book ii. c. x.

[2] A mythical King of Britain, and a supposed descendant of Æneas, the son of Anchises. Hence the reference later to Sabrina as "sprung of old Anchises' line."

Of pansies, pinks and gaudy daffodils.
And, as the old swain said, she can unlock
The clasping charm, and thaw the numbing spell,
If she be right invoked in warbled song :
For maidenhood she loves, and will be swift
To aid a virgin, such as was herself,
In hard-besetting need. This will I try,
And add the pow'r of some adjuring verse.

SONG

Sabrina fair,
Listen where thou art sitting
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
In twisted braids of lilies knitting
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair ;
Listen for dear honour's sake,
Goddess of the silver lake,
Listen, and save.
Listen, and appear to us,
In name of great Oceanus ;
By the earth-shaking Neptune's mace,
And Tethys' grave majestic pace,
By hoary Nereus' wrinkled look,
And the Carpathian Wisard's hook,[1]
By scaly Triton's winding shell,
And old sooth-saying Glaucus' spell,
By Leucothea's lovely hands,
And her son that rules the strands,
By Thetis' tinsel-slippered feet,
And the songs of Syrens sweet,
By dead Parthenopè's dear tomb,
And fair Ligea's golden comb,
Wherewith she sits on diamond rocks,
Sleeking her soft alluring locks ;

[1] Proteus, who lived in the island of Carpathus, between Crete and Rhodes.

By all the Nymphs that nightly dance
Upon thy streams with wily glance,
Rise, rise, and heave thy rosy head,
From thy coral-paven bed,
And bridle in thy headlong wave,
Till thou our summons answered have.
Listen, and save.

Sabrina *rises, attended by water-nymphs, and sings*

By the rushy-fringèd bank,
Where grows the willow, and the osier dank,
My sliding chariot stays,
Thick set with agate, and the azure sheen
Of turkis blue, and emerald green,
That in the channel strays ;
Whilst from off the waters fleet
Thus I set my printless feet
O'er the cowslip's velvet head,
That bends not as I tread ;
Gentle swain, at thy request,
I am here.

Spirit. Goddess dear,
We implore thy pow'rful hand
To undo the charmèd band
Of true virgin here distressed,
Through the force, and through the wile
Of unblest enchanter vile.
Sab. Shepherd, 'tis my office best
To help ensnarèd chastity :
Brightest Lady, look on me.
Thus I sprinkle on thy breast
Drops, that from my fountain pure
I have kept, of precious cure ;
Thrice upon thy finger's tip,
Thrice upon thy rubied lip :

Next this marble venomed seat,
Smeared with gums of glut'nous heat,
I touch with chaste palms moist and cold : —
Now the spell hath lost his hold ;
And I must haste, ere morning hour,
To wait in Amphitritè's bow'r.

Sabrina *descends, and the* Lady *rises out of her seat*

Spirit. Virgin, daughter of Locrine,
Sprung of old Anchises' line,
May thy brimmèd waves for this
Their full tribute never miss
From a thousand petty rills,
That tumble down the snowy hills :
Summer drouth, or singèd air,
Never scorch thy tresses fair,
Nor wet October's torrent flood
Thy molten crystal fill with mud ;
May thy billows roll ashore
The beryl and the golden ore ;
May thy lofty head be crowned
With many a tow'r and terrace round,
And here and there thy banks upon
With groves of myrrh and cinnamon !
Come, Lady, while Heav'n lends us grace,
Let us fly this cursèd place,
Lest the Sorc'rer us entice
With some other new device.
Not a waste or needless sound
Till we come to holier ground ;
I shall be your faithful guide
Through this gloomy covert wide,
And not many furlongs thence
Is your Father's residence,
Where this night are met in state
Many a friend to gratulate

His wished presence ; and beside
All the swains, that there abide,
With jigs and rural dance resort :
We shall catch them at their sport,
And our sudden coming there
Will double all their mirth and cheer :
Come, let us haste, the stars grow high,
But Night sits monarch yet in the mid sky.

The Scene changes, presenting Ludlow town and the President's castle ; then come in country dancers ; after them the Attendant Spirit, *with the* Two Brothers *and the* Lady

SPIRIT'S SONG

Back, Shepherds, back ; enough your play,
Till next sun-shine holiday :
Here be, without duck or nod,
Other trippings to be trod
Of lighter toes, and such court guise
As Mercury did first devise,
With the mincing Dryades,
On the lawns, and on the leas.

This second song presents them to their Father *and* Mother

Noble Lord, and Lady bright,
I have brought ye new delight ;
Here behold so goodly grown
Three fair branches of your own ;
Heav'n hath timely tried their youth,
Their faith, their patience, and their truth;
And sent them here through hard assays
With a crown of deathless praise,
To triumph in victorious dance
O'er sensual Folly and Intemperance.

The dances ended, the Spirit *epiloguizes*

Spirit. To the ocean now I fly,
And those happy climes that lie
Where Day never shuts his eye,
Up in the broad fields of the sky ;
There I suck the liquid air
All amidst the gardens fair
Of Hesp'rus, and his daughters three
That sing about the golden tree :
Along the crispèd shades and bow'rs
Revels the spruce and jocund Spring ;
The Graces, and the rosy-bosomed Hours,
Thither all their bounties bring ;
There eternal Summer dwells,
And west-winds, with musky wing,
About the cedars' alleys fling
Nard and Cassia's balmy smells.
Iris there with humid bow
Waters the od'rous banks, that blow
Flowers of more mingled hue
Than her purfled scarf can show ;
And drenches with Elysian dew
(List, mortals, if your ears be true),
Beds of hyacinth and roses,
Where young Adonis oft reposes,
Waxing well of his deep wound
In slumber soft ; and on the ground
Sadly sits th' Assyrian Queen : [1]
But far above in spangled sheen
Celestial Cupid, her famed son advanced,
Holds his dear Psychè sweet entranced,
After her wand'ring labours long,
Till free consent the gods among
Make her his eternal bride,
And from her fair unspotted side

[1] Venus; so called because she was identified with the Assyrian Astarte.

Two blissful twins are to be born,
Youth and Joy ; so Jove hath sworn.
But now my task is smoothly done,
I can fly, or I can run,
Quickly to the green earth's end,
Where the bowed welkin slow doth bend ;
And from thence can soar as soon
To the corners of the moon.
Mortals, that would follow me,
Love Virtue ; she alone is free :
She can teach ye how to climb
Higher than the Sphery Chime ;
Or if Virtue feeble were,
Heav'n itself would stoop to her.

After the production of "Comus" Milton's poetic powers subsided for a time, though he continued his studies with unabated enthusiasm. Not that he had by any means abandoned the thought of poetry as his true career. Far from it. The determination to devote himself to some great work which should make his name immortal was year by year growing upon him. But for the moment he did not feel himself ready. "Hear me, Theoditus," he writes to Diodati, "but in your ear, lest I blush ; and allow me for a little to speak big words to you. Do you ask me what I am thinking of? So may the good God help me, of Immortality. But what am I doing? I am pluming my wings and preparing to fly ; but my Pegasus has not yet feathers enough to bear it aloft." What came of this now clearly conceived ambition we shall learn in the sequel. Meanwhile, as the

same letter goes on to tell us, he was beginning to feel cramped and ill at ease at Horton. His mother had died a few months before—in April 1637—and perhaps her death had something to do with his newly awakened desire for change. In the country, as he had now come to realise, he was "buried in obscurity"; he needed a larger life and more varied companionship. For this reason, as he further informs his friend, he was planning to migrate to town, and to seek there a convenient lodging in "some inn of the lawyers," where the social surroundings would be more stimulating, and where at the same time he would find quietude, seclusion, and "a pleasant and shady walk" for his hours of meditation and exercise.

This was written in September 1637, about a month, we may note in passing, after Ben Jonson had been laid to rest in the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. Almost immediately after this, though the great flight of which he had spoken was not even attempted, a sad occasion inspired him suddenly and unexpectedly to further poetic effort. The poem which he now produced was a very different thing indeed from the mighty epic which he was already contemplating. But in the valuation of art we think little of mere bulk; and "Lycidas," an elegy of under two hundred lines, is still one of the glories of English literature.

Among Milton's chief companions at Christ's College had been a young man, some three years his junior, named Edward King. A youth of

fine talents and amiable character, King had a brilliant college career ; he became a Fellow of his college when only just out of his undergraduateship ; took his Master's degree in 1633 ; and was presently made a tutor. He was at this time busily preparing himself to enter the Church. That he was extremely popular with all who knew him is perfectly clear ; nor is it less clear that he impressed friends and strangers alike as a man who was certain to make his mark in the world and to become a leader in the cause of goodness and truth. But as in the case of Arthur Hallam, of whom King inevitably reminds us, fate mysteriously intervened, and the high promises of these early years never found fruition. In the Long Vacation of 1637, with the intention of visiting relatives in Ireland, he set out from Chester Bay in a vessel bound for Dublin. On August 10, in absolutely calm weather, the ill-starred ship struck a rock on the Welsh coast, and foundered. A few of the passengers were saved. Among those who perished was Edward King. The news of his tragic death came as a sad shock to his college friends and associates, who resolved to enshrine their affection and grief in a book of memorial verses. As a number of writers were asked to contribute, there was some delay in the completion of the work, and the volume did not appear till the following year. It contained twenty-three poems in Greek and Latin and thirteen in English. "Lycidas," which Milton had

finished in November 1637, is the last, as it is the longest, in the English division.

In form and method "Lycidas," like "Comus," is directly connected with the Renaissance and its classicism. It belongs to the kind of poetry which we call the pastoral elegy; that is, it is an elegy in the shape of a song sung by a shepherd mourning for a dead companion, and is full of conventional bucolic imagery. For the origin of this particular type of elegy we have to go back to the pastoral poetry of later Greek literature, and especially to the "Lament for Adonis" by the Ionian poet Bion, and the "Lament for Bion" by Moschus of Syracuse. At the time of the revival of learning, when the masterpieces of Greek and Latin antiquity became the objects of unbounded and indeed undiscriminating admiration, the pastoral elegy, like all other kinds of classical poetry, passed into modern European literature, and in this as in other cases admiration naturally led to imitation. Thus Spenser's "Astrophel," a memorial poem on the death of "the most noble and virtuous knight, Sir Philip Sidney," is conceived and executed upon the strict lines of the Greek pastoral elegy, and in its extreme artificiality may indeed be regarded as a typical example of the courtly-classic taste which prevailed in English non-dramatic literature during the Elizabethan age. These lines Milton again follows in "Lycidas," in which, instead of expressing directly his sorrow for the loss of his friend, he adopts the convention

of a lamenting shepherd, the bucolic tone and manner which had become inseparable from the elegiac tradition, and all the accessory pastoral details of the well-established academic form. It is important to lay stress upon the purely derivative character of Milton's machinery and to refer this to its true sources, as otherwise we shall be very apt to find fault with the poem, as Johnson found fault with it, for its want of nature and truth. Edward King, we may say, was a young college man of seventeenth-century England, and not a shepherd; he had no connection, save in literature, with the fauns and satyrs who are here made his companions; he and Milton never tended sheep together; in a word, the whole setting of the poem is a piece of elaborate and unconvincing make-believe. But we must remember that in this sort of criticism we are expressing the taste of our time and are making no allowance for that of Milton's age, and that to him and to his classically trained readers what seems to us so artificial appeared perfectly natural and fitting. Moreover, while Milton reproduces all the stereotyped Arcadian externals of his models, he does none the less contrive to keep very close to actuality. "Through the guise of all the pastoral circumstances and imagery," as Masson well says, "there is a studious representation of the facts of King's brief life and his accidental death, and of Milton's regard for him, and academic intimacy with him." Here we note the extreme interest of the passage already referred to—the

passage beginning : " For we were nursed upon the self-same hill." In this, under the conventional forms of pastoral expression, we have a clear rendering of personal history. " The hill," as Masson explains, " is, of course, Cambridge ; the joint feeding of the flock is companionship in study ; the rural ditties on the oaten pipe are academic iambics and elegiacs ; and old Damœtas is either Chappel [Milton's first tutor] . . . or some more kindly Fellow of Christ's."

Like " Comus," then, " Lycidas " is a product of the art and learning of the Renaissance ; but also, like " Comus," though in a far more direct and obvious way, it is the vehicle of a religious and ethical spirit which is fundamentally foreign to that art and learning. In saying this, I am not thinking only of its general religious thought, here again so curiously combined with the imagery of pagan mythology ; of its splendid enunciation of faith in immortality ; or even of its high and strenuous moral temper. I mean that in " Lycidas " Milton is at length definitely Puritan ; that his Puritanism is no longer merely implicit as a pervading influence, but has become specific, militant, ecclesiastical. This is shown in the famous passage of denunciation, spoken by St. Peter, which breaks in upon the low, sweet strains of the elegy like the sudden sound of a trumpet-blast calling to battle, and in which for the moment the classic poet's mood of tender meditation is exchanged for the stern zeal of the

Hebrew prophet proclaiming the wrath to come. In the judgment of many critics this fierce attack upon the corrupt clergy of the time—no true shepherds (for so the pastoral metaphor is carried out), but mere hirelings—is an artistic mistake ; it is not, they urge, in keeping with the body of the monody, and is fatal to that unity of feeling and tone by which such a poem should be characterised. ' But even if it be, strictly speaking, out of place, it is only the more conclusive testimony to the strength of the poet's emotion, which thus imperatively demands an outlet. To understand its significance we must remember not only the change in Milton's mind, but also the course of events by which that change had been brought about. Three years had passed since " Comus " was written, and that brief intervening period had witnessed continual encroachments by the king and his ill-advising counsellors upon the constitutional and religious liberties of the English people. The absolutism which Charles and Strafford were endeavouring to establish in the State, Laud on his side was equally determined to establish in the Church. A harsh, narrow-minded, and obstinate despot, he ruthlessly pursued his policy of stamping out every suggestion of Puritanism in the Anglican communion, destroying freedom of conscience and of worship, and forcing the whole of religious England into that rigid uniformity of public ritual which was his ideal. At the same time, while he had recourse to the most brutal severity

in all his dealings with nonconforming Protestants, he behaved with conspicuous leniency towards Roman Catholics, and as this leniency was obviously due, not to liberality of opinion or the spirit of tolerance (of which he knew nothing), but to personal preferences, it boded ill for the work of the Reformation. The immense development in the mere externals of public worship which took place under his rule was regarded by the Puritans, to whom all ceremonial formalism was hateful, as a sure sign of his sympathy with the anti-Protestant tendencies which were at work in the land; even moderate men began to suspect that it was his ultimate design to bring the Church of England as near as possible to the Church of Rome, perhaps even to unite it to the Church of Rome; and the known bias of the Court, taken in conjunction with his policy of relentless bigotry, spread a feeling of panic among the masses of the people. By 1637, indeed, Laud had succeeded in alienating the best thought of England, and in fanning into a mighty flame the spirit of antagonism which had been rising rapidly in the Puritan party ever since his appointment to the Archbishopric of Canterbury four years before. Such was the state of things in the English religious world when Milton wrote his "Lycidas"; and it was because he so keenly realised the peril of the hour, because his soul was filled with such indignation and contempt for everything that Laud and his followers stood for and were seeking to achieve,

that he poured out his passion in the burning lines in which, for the first time, he openly proclaimed his sympathy with the Puritan cause. Whatever, therefore, may be said about the artistic aspects of the passage in question, its autobiographical interest is unmistakable.

LYCIDAS:[1] A MONODY

[In this Monody the Author bewails a learned friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637. And by occasion, foretells the ruin of our corrupted clergy, then in their highth.][2]

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more
Ye Myrtles brown, with ivy never-sere,
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude;
And, with forced fingers rude,
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year:
Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,
Compels me to disturb your season due:
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.
Who would not sing for Lycidas? He knew
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.
He must not float upon his wat'ry bier
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
Without the meed of some melodious tear.
Begin, then, Sisters of the Sacred Well[3]
That from beneath the Seat of Jove doth spring;
Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.
Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse:
So may some gentle Muse
With lucky words favour my destined urn;

[1] Lycidas is the name of a shepherd in Virgil's ninth Eclogue.
[2] This explanatory note was added by Milton in the first edition of his collected poems, published in 1645.
[3] The fountain of the Muses on Mount Helicon.

And, as he passes, turn,
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud.
  For we were nursed upon the self-same hill,
Fed the same flock by fountain, shade and rill.
Together both, ere the high lawns appeared
Under the op'ning eye-lids of the morn,
We drove afield, and both together heard
What time the gray-fly winds her sultry horn,
Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
Oft, till the star, that rose, at ev'ning, bright,
Towards Heav'n's descent had sloped his west'ring
    wheel,
Mean while the rural ditties were not mute,
Tempered to th' oaten flute ;
Rough Satyrs danced, and Fauns with cloven heel
From the glad sound would not be absent long ;
And old Damœtas[1] loved to hear our song.
  But, oh, the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return !
Thee, Shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves,
With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,
And all their echoes mourn :
The willows, and the hazel copses green,
Shall now no more be seen
Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays.
As killing as the canker to the rose,
Or taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze,
Or frost to flow'rs, that their gay wardrobe wear,
When first the whitethorn blows ;
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to shepherds' ear.
  Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep
Closed o'er the head of your loved Lycidas ?
For neither were ye playing on the steep,[2]

[1] One of the shepherds in Virgil's Eclogues.
[2] "Perhaps Penmaenmawr, overhanging the sea opposite Anglesea" (Keightley).

Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie,
Nor on the shaggy top of Mona [1] high,
Nor yet where Deva [2] spreads her wisard stream :
Ay me ! I fondly dream !
Had ye been there—for what could that have
done ?
What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,
The Muse herself, for her enchanting son,
Whom universal Nature did lament,
When, by the rout that made the hideous roar,
His gory visage down the stream was sent,
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore ?
Alas ! What boots it with incessant care
To tend the homely, slighted shepherd's trade,
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse ?
Were it not better done, as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis [3] in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neæra's [3] hair ?
Fame is the spur that the clear sp'rit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days ;
But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Fury [4] with th' abhorred shears,
And slits the thin-spun life. "But not the praise,"
Phœbus replied, and touched my trembling ears ;
"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glist'ring foil
Set off to th' world, nor in broad rumour lies ;
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove ;
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed."

[1] Anglesea. [2] The River Dee.
[3] Names of shepherdesses in classical pastoral poetry.
[4] Atropos, not really a Fury, but one of the three Fates.

O fountain Arethuse,[1] and thou honoured flood,
Smooth-sliding Mincius,[2] crowned with vocal reeds.
That strain I heard was of a higher mood :
But now my oat [3] proceeds,
And listens to the Herald of the Sea [4]
That came in Neptune's plea ;
He asked the waves, and asked the felon winds,
What hard mishap hath doomed this gentle swain ?
And questioned ev'ry gust of rugged wings
That blows from off each beakèd promont'ry :
They knew not of his story ;
And sage Hippotades their answer brings,
That not a blast was from his dungeon strayed ;
The air was calm, and on the level brine
Sleek Panopè with all her sisters played.
It was that fatal and perfidious bark,
Built in th' eclipse, and rigged with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.
Next Camus,[5] rev'rend sire, went footing slow,
His mantle hairy, and his bonnet sedge,
Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge
Like to that sanguine flow'r inscribed with woe.
" Ah ! Who hath reft (quoth he) my dearest
pledge ? "
Last came, and last did go,
The pilot of the Galilean Lake ; [6]
Two massy keys he bore of metals twain
(The golden opes, the iron shuts amain),
He shook his mitered locks, and stern bespake :
" How well could I have spared for thee, young
Swain,

[1] A fountain near Syracuse, the native place of the pastoral poet Theocritus.
[2] A river in Northern Italy, near the birthplace of Virgil.
[3] Oaten pipe, the symbol of pastoral poetry.
[4] Triton, son of Neptune.
[5] God of the river Cam, and the personification of Cambridge University.
[6] St. Peter. See Matt. xvi. 19.

Enow of such, as for their bellies' sake
Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold?
Of other care they little reck'ning make,
Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast,
And shove away the worthy bidden guest;
Blind mouths,—that scarce themselves know how
to hold
A sheep-hook, or have learned aught else the least
That to the faithful herdman's art belongs!
What recks it them? What need they? They
are sped;
And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw;
The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
But, swoll'n with wind and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread:
Besides what the grim wolf [1] with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing said:
But that Two-handed Engine [2] at the door
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more."
Return, Alpheüs,[3] the dread Voice is passed,
That shrunk thy streams; return, Sicilian Muse,
And call the vales, and bid them hither cast
Their bells, and flow'rets of a thousand hues.
Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use
Of shades, and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
On whose fresh lap the swart-star [4] sparely looks;
Throw hither all your quaint enamelled eyes,
That on the green turf suck the honied show'rs,
And purple all the ground with vernal flow'rs.

[1] The Church of Rome; with special reference doubtless to the Romanising tendencies of Laud's party.

[2] There has been much discussion as to the meaning of this phrase (see Masson's "Milton," iii. 154-156). The probable reference is to Rev. ii. 12, and iii. 20.

[3] With this reference to the river-god who loved Arethusa, Milton brings his poem back most skilfully to its proper subject.

[4] Sirius, the dog-star.

Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,
The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,
The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,
The glowing violet,
The musk-rose, and the well-attired woodbine,
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,
And ev'ry flow'r that sad embroid'ry wears :
Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,
And daffodillies fill their cups with tears,
To strew the laureat hearse where Lycid lies.
For, so to interpose a little ease,
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise ;
Ay me ! Whilst thee the shores and sounding seas
Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurled,
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,
Where thou perhaps, under the whelming tide,
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous [1] world ;
Or whether thou, to our moist vows denied,
Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,[2]
Where the great vision of the guarded Mount [3]
Looks towards Namancos and Bayona's hold ; [4]
Look homeward, Angel, now, and melt with ruth ;
And, O ye Dolphins, waft the hapless youth.
Weep no more, woeful Shepherds, weep no more,
For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,
Sunk though he be beneath the wat'ry floor ;
So sinks the Day-star in the ocean bed,
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore

[1] The sea-depths inhabited by monsters.
[2] St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall, was anciently called Bellerium; and from this Milton coins the name Bellerus.
[3] St. Michael's Mount. St. Michael is said to have appeared as a "vision" on this Mount, which was therefore named after him.
[4] On the coast of Gallicia, or Northern Spain.

Flames in the forehead of the morning sky :
So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
Through the dear might of Him that walked the
waves ;
Where, other groves, and other streams along,
With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,
And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,
In the blest kingdoms meek of Joy and Love.
There entertain him all the Saints Above,
In solemn troops, and sweet societies,
That sing and, singing, in their glory move,
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.
Now, Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more ;
Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore,
In thy large recompense, and shalt be good
To all that wander in that per'lous flood.
Thus sang the uncouth swain to th' oaks and
rills,
While the still Morn went out with sandals gray ;
He touched the tender stops of various quills,
With eager thought warbling his Doric lay :
And now the sun had stretched out all the hills,
And now was dropped into the western bay.
At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue :
To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.

With this great elegy we reach the close of Milton's first period of poetic production. Let the reader now look back and consider how the writings of these six quiet years at Horton provide a record of intellectual growth, of deepening moral fervour, of a steady change in the poet's whole temper and attitude to life. Step by step, as I have tried to show, we can trace in them the gradual movement of his mind

toward the Puritanism with which henceforth he was to be so intimately associated. As Mr. Stopford Brooke, reversing the order of our own study, has said, "The Milton of 'Lycidas' is not the Milton of 'Comus.' The Milton of 'Comus' is not the Milton of the 'Penseroso,' still less of the 'Allegro'"; while, again, to push the analysis a stage further back, "The Milton of the 'Penseroso' is not the Milton of the 'Ode to the Nativity.' Nothing of the Renaissance is left now but its learning and its art." Yet, as the last sentence should remind us, Milton's progressive Puritanism did not involve the repudiation of the classic culture in which he had been bred. If at the age of thirty nothing of the Renaissance was left to him but its learning and its art, we must never forget that at least these were left. Had they not been left, "Paradise Lost" would have been an impossibility. The great fact upon which we have to fix our attention is that Milton became a Puritan without ceasing to be a humanist; only, from this time onward, the art and the learning of the Renaissance were not to be cultivated for their own sakes; they were to be employed in the service of those religious and moral truths which had now become the dominant factors in his life.

IV

MILTON did not at once carry out his plan of settling in London. He resolved instead upon a Continental tour. He had become, in his own words, "anxious to visit foreign parts, and particularly Italy." His craving for Italy, the centre and home of Renaissance culture, shows the continued strength of the humanist and the artist in him. Accordingly he left London in May 1638, well provided with letters of introduction which assured his admission to the best literary circles of the Continent, and designing to spend at least three years abroad. He went first to Paris, where he met the celebrated Dutch philosopher and theologian, Grotius. Thence he made his way to Nice, where he took ship for Genoa, and passing on through Leghorn and Pisa, reached Florence in August. In Florence, which he had "always more particularly esteemed for the elegance of its dialect, its genius, and its taste," he lingered about two months, living on terms of intimacy "with many persons of rank and learning," and regularly frequenting the "literary parties," or clubs of *dilettanti*, which he notes as a delightful feature in the life of the Tuscan capital. In Rome, which was the next place on his itinerary, he spent nearly three months, immersed in the antiquities of the Eternal City, and again finding a warm welcome from men

prominent in literature and scholarship. Then towards the end of November he pushed on to Naples, where he remained two months, and where he received "singular proofs" of regard from a nobleman of great distinction, named Manso, who in earlier life had been a friend and patron of the famous Italian poet Tasso. His plans had been laid for an extension of his journey by way of Sicily into Greece, for if he had felt the spell of Italy, he felt no less that of Athens:

> Athens, the Eye of Greece, Mother of Arts
> And Eloquence.[1]

But at this point his course was suddenly checked. "When I was preparing to pass over into Sicily and Greece," he tells us, "the melancholy intelligence which I received of the civil commotions in England made me alter my purpose; for I thought it base to be travelling for amusement abroad while my fellow-citizens were fighting for liberty at home."[2] The political and religious struggle in England was now, as he learned, passing into a critical stage; and much as he must have regretted the abandonment of his plans, he responded without hesitation to what seemed to him to be the unmistakable call of duty; for in such a juncture the place of every Englishman was in England. Yet, curiously enough, instead of hastening on, as might in the circumstances have been expected, he loitered much upon his

[1] "Paradise Regained," IV. 240, 241. [2] "Defensio Secunda."

homeward way. A second stay of two months in Rome was followed by a sojourn of equal length in Florence, where, it is specially interesting to remember, he now "found and visited the famous Galileo, grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition, for thinking in astronomy otherwise than the Franciscan and Dominican licensers thought."[1] His visit to the blind old astronomer, who is not only one of the world's great scientists but also one of the noble army of martyrs in the cause of intellectual freedom, evidently made a deep impression upon him; many years later he recalled Galileo's use of the telescope, of which he then doubtless learned, in some lines in "Paradise Lost" comparing Satan's shield with the moon:

> . . . whose orb
> Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views
> At evening from the top of Fesolé,
> Or in Valdarno, to descry new lands,
> Rivers or mountains on her spotty globe.[2]

Crossing the Apennines, he then went through Bologna and Ferrara to Venice, where, first despatching by ship the books and music he had collected in Italy, he spent a month "in surveying the curiosities of this city"; after which he "proceeded through Verona and Milan, and along the Leman Lake to Geneva." There, he tells us, he "held daily conferences" with the well-known theologian Giovanni Diodati, uncle of his dear friend Charles Diodati, whom he had

[1] "Areopagitica." [2] I. 287-291.

left on the point of commencing practice as a physician in London. It is a singular coincidence that it was during his stay in Geneva that news reached him of Charles's death. This sad event inspired a little later the last and the best of his Latin poems, the "Epitaphium Damonis," or "Lament for Damon." Though, like "Lycidas," this follows the strict pastoral convention, it is, despite its alien language, far more tender in feeling and personal in tone than the English elegy. With the sadness of his loss weighing heavily upon him, he now retraced his former course through France, reaching London in August 1639. He had been absent just fifteen months.

Two matters connected with this Continental tour are worthy of passing remark. In the first place, we have his word for it that, wherever he went and whatever might be the society in which he found himself, though it was his invariable rule "never to be the first to begin any conversation on religion," yet, if any question were put to him concerning his own faith, he answered it "without any reserve or fear." This freedom of utterance under repressive conditions which he deplored led occasionally to slight difficulties, and once almost to serious trouble; for on his way back from Naples to Rome he learned from some merchants that the English Jesuits in the latter city had laid a plot against him because he had spoken too boldly about religion. Nevertheless, he adds, "I again openly defended, as I had done

before, the Reformed religion in the very metropolis of Popery." Secondly, an element of romance pertains to his Italian travels which is the more interesting on account of the mystery which still surrounds it. Some years afterwards, replying to the loose accusations of one of his many calumniators, Milton proudly declared that "in all those places in which vice meets so little discouragement and is practised with so little shame, I never once deviated from the paths of integrity and virtue." No one who knows him would for a moment question his statement. Yet we wholly misconceive his character if we imagine that his absolute rectitude and austere purity of life betokened any deficiency on the emotional side. On the contrary, his was indeed an ardent nature, and one extraordinarily sensitive to the fascinations of beauty and the influences of love. This is strikingly illustrated by the romantic incident now referred to. Somewhere in Italy, perhaps towards the end of his tour there, though regarding both place and time we are in entire uncertainty, he met an Italian lady, dark-eyed, dark-haired, who at once took his heart captive by her personal loveliness and the charm of her singing, and aroused in him a passion so strong that, as it would seem, he had to seek safety from it in flight. The patient searchings of the biographers have thus far failed to bring to light any particulars of this episode; no clue has been discovered to the identity of the lady; nothing is known of the circumstances in which

he met her or of the details of their relationship. Five Italian sonnets and a *canzone* which will be found in any complete edition of Milton's poetical works remain as our only record of what must have been, at the time, a critical passage in his life. I mention it here because it brings into such clear view an aspect of Milton's complex character which, in our preoccupation with his Puritanism, we are too apt to overlook.

The news which had reached Milton in Naples had not exaggerated the gravity of the situation at home. On his arrival in England he found the king engaged in what is known as the Bishops' war with the Scots, who were resisting by force of arms the attempt of Laud to dictate to them in matters of Church government and religious worship. Disaffection spread; things went from bad to worse; supported by his two evil counsellors, Laud and Strafford, Charles pursued his reckless policy of high-handed tyranny, vacillation, and childish blundering. For eleven years—from March 1629 to April 1640—he had persisted in ruling the country without a Parliament. The Parliament which he was then compelled to convene—the Short Parliament as it is called—was dissolved by him in twenty-three days because it made demands upon him which in his unwisdom he saw fit to reject. His action greatly exasperated the Commons. In the November of the same year Parliament was again called together, and this time the king did not dare to interfere. Then the storm broke. Strafford was impeached,

tried, and, abandoned by the royal master whom he had served not indeed well but faithfully according to his lights, perished on the scaffold. A struggle for supremacy ensued between the king and the House of Commons, and in 1642 England was plunged into civil war. As in this tremendous conflict it was practically inevitable that every man should take a side, minor differences were for the time being obliterated. In each camp there were moderate men as well as extremists, but, speaking generally, the opposed armies represented the king and the Church on the one side, and Parliament and Puritanism on the other.

The language which Milton used regarding his return to England clearly suggests his intention of taking some personal part in public affairs. Apparently he found no immediate opening for his energies, for, "cheerfully leaving" the burning issues of the hour "first to God, and then to those to whom the people had committed that task," he himself resumed his former studious routine of life. He took lodgings to begin with in the house of a tailor in St. Bride's Churchyard, Fleet Street, moving thence in 1640 to a "pretty garden-house" in Aldersgate Street, then outside the walls and in a quiet, almost rural quarter of the city. Not even now did he adopt any definite profession, contentedly living in his simple fashion on the means provided by his father. But he employed much of his time in the education of his nephews, John and Edward Phillips, sons of his only sister

by her first marriage, and in this way he was led a little later to take a few other pupils into his house.

Meanwhile he had found that it was by pamphleteering that, as a private citizen, he could for the time being most effectively help his fellow-countrymen in their struggle for political and religious liberty. "I resolved," he says, "though I was then meditating other matters, to transfer into this struggle all my genius and all the strength of my industry." He now became active and influential as a prose-writer and controversialist, setting aside in obedience to the urgent claims of the hour the prosecution of those poetic designs upon which more than ever he had set his heart. But before we turn to the polemical work which, though he did not then guess it, was to absorb his energies and to withhold him from the "other matters" of which he speaks for the next twenty years, it will be well to outline the course of his private life.

Unfortunately, the record soon becomes disturbed by domestic troubles. In June 1643 he married Mary Powell, the daughter of an Oxfordshire squire. This was, as the immediate sequel showed, a most injudicious step. That Milton should have taken it, and taken it, as is only too evident, without forethought, is another fact which proves in how many important respects the popular conception of his character needs correction. As it was, the strong feelings and idealising imagination of the poet must

have blinded him for the moment to all consideration of consequences. He was now thirty-five years old, a man of staid and somewhat austere manners, whose mind moved habitually upon the highest planes of thought, and was impatient of the trivial interests of the daily round of things. His wife was a commonplace and rather giddy girl of seventeen. Their tempers were thus entirely incompatible ; and to make matters worse, she came of a Cavalier family. Accustomed to a large household and plenty of jovial company, she soon found the home to which her husband brought her lonely, and the way of life there unbearably dull. Misunderstandings at once arose ; and before a month was out, she begged his permission to go back to her parents for the rest of the summer. He granted the request on condition that she should return by Michaelmas. Michaelmas came, and she still remained away ; whereupon, according to the statement of one of his nephews, her husband " thought it would be dishonourable ever to receive her again." After the lapse of two years, and in accordance with a theory of his concerning the dissolubility of the marriage-bond, he even began to think of another marriage. Reconciliation, however, now took place between himself and his wife. The overtures came from the Powell family, who had been brought by Royalist reverses into great distress ; an interview was arranged in a friend's house ; and in the late summer of 1645 Mrs. Milton took her place once more in her husband's

home. As Mr. Mark Pattison suggests, it is impossible not to believe that Milton had the "impressive scene" of the reconciliation before his mind when, twenty years later, he wrote in "Paradise Lost" of the reconciliation of Adam and Eve:

> Eve, with tears that ceased not flowing,
> And tresses all disorder'd, at his feet
> Fell humble, and embracing them, besought
> His peace. . . .
> Her lowly plight
> Immovable, till peace obtain'd from fault
> Acknowledg'd and deplor'd, in Adam wrought
> Commiseration; soon his heart relented
> Tow'rds her, his life so late and sole delight,
> Now at his feet submissive in distress—
> Creature so fair his reconcilement seeking . . .
> At once disarm'd, his anger all he lost.[1]

We can, I am afraid, scarcely suppose that any great happiness attended the reunion of the ill-matched pair; but at least we hear of no further quarrels or estrangement. That there had been faults on both sides must be admitted, and we need not try to exonerate Milton from his own share of the blame. But to his credit it must be added that, though never of a conciliatory temper, he consented in June 1646 to take the now impoverished family of the Powells into his household. Considering that Mrs. Powell had throughout been a chief influence in her daughter's headstrong behaviour, and

[1] X. 937 ff.

that the presence of these decayed Royalists was both embarrassing and irksome to him, the fact testifies to great magnanimity on his part. As his father had settled with him in 1643, and as three children—Anne, Mary, and Deborah—were in due time born to him, his family was now a large one. Fortunately, after the return of his wife he had moved into a more commodious house in Barbican, a street leading out of Aldersgate. There were, however, other changes of residence before his home-circle was broken by the death of his father in 1647 and that of his wife in 1653.

Such was the tenor of Milton's private life when, between 1641 and 1645, he was writing, before his marriage, his pamphlets on Church government, and after, his "Areopagitica" and his tractates on education and divorce. With these and other prose writings to be mentioned later we are concerned here only for their value in connection with our author's personality and aims. A few words about them will therefore suffice. To the ordinary lover of Milton's poetry they are indeed in themselves hardly attractive. They are marked by noble earnestness, passionate intensity of feeling, and bursts of splendid eloquence; but the issues with which they deal have for us to-day little more than an historical interest; their style (and Milton himself said they were the work of his "left hand") is habitually involved, cumbrous, and heavy; while too often they are rank with the fiercest spirit of partisanship and

with all the bitterness and gross personal abuse which in general characterised the polemical literature of an age which knew nothing of even the rudimentary amenities of theological and political discussion. In speaking in this way of these prose writings, however, we must make an exception in favour of one of them—the "Areopagitica." Milton's theories of Church government and of marriage and divorce will be considered in detail only by the special student. But every lover of books and of intellectual liberty should read for himself this magnificent "unspoken oration" in defence of freedom of thought and an unlicensed Press. By an order of Parliament in 1643 the Government had forbidden the publication, reprinting, and importation of any unlicensed publications. Milton saw with disgust that the Parliamentary party now in power were thus proving faithless to their trust and their principles. They had stood for liberty—liberty of conscience and opinion as well as political liberty; and now they were busy reviving intellectual despotism under another form—that of the censorship of the Press. So Milton was moved to write his great plea, and as Mr. Stopford Brooke has justly said, "its defense of books, and the freedom of books, will last as long as there are writers and readers of books." Here and there, amid the general argument, are passages which are for ever memorable; as notably this one, which, familiar as it is, I yet cannot forbear quoting:

> For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are ; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively, and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous dragon's teeth ; and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men. And yet on the other hand, unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a man as kill a good book ; who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image ; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth ; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.

Yet, while the "Areopagitica" differs from the rest of Milton's prose writings in the permanence of its interest, it is still absolutely at one with them in its inspiration and purpose. Its keynote is liberty ; and liberty under one or another form is equally the keynote of all his other pamphlets. This is the point to be emphasised, and it is brought out very clearly in the full account which Milton himself gives in his "Defensio Secunda" of his literary activities after his return from the Continent. He here explains that, having leisure to direct his thoughts "to the promotion of real and substantial liberty, which is rather to be sought from within than from without, and whose existence depends, not so much on the terror of the sword, as on sobriety of conduct and

integrity of life," he had come to perceive "that there were three species of liberty which are essential to the happiness of social life—religious, domestic, and civil." His pamphlets on Church government, in which he took the side not of the moderate reformers, but of the radicals, were his contributions to the cause of religious liberty. Civil liberty he left untouched, because "the magistrates were strenuously active in obtaining" it. As for domestic liberty, this, as he conceived it, involved "three material questions—the conditions of the conjugal tie, the education of the children, and the free publication of thoughts." The "Areopagitica" is devoted, as we have seen, to the last of these great topics. His tract on Education is based upon the principle that a proper training in virtue is "the only genuine source of political and individual liberty." It has little importance on the pedagogical side, but it shows how fully the writer recognised the fact that if liberty is left to those who are not inwardly fit for it, it will soon degenerate into license; and like every true lover of liberty, Milton had a horror of license. Finally, in his four tractates on divorce, he boldly advocated views which even now would be deemed advanced, attacking the doctrine of the indissolubility of the marriage-bond, and maintaining the thesis that a just ground for dissolving it may be found in "indisposition, unfitness, or contrariety of mind." It is a nice question how far these opinions were directly influenced by his own

unfortunate venture in wedlock ; certainly if, as seems probable, the first of these pamphlets was actually written during the month preceding his wife's desertion of him, the connection between his theories and his personal experiences may have been very close. But we have not now to analyse his arguments or weigh his conclusions. It is enough to note that his unqualified enunciation of ideas which he knew to be extremely unpopular even among his friends is a signal proof of his moral courage, and that in this matter again he regarded himself, rightly or wrongly, as the apostle of a wise and beneficial liberty. On the question of the relations of the sexes, Milton, as every reader of "Paradise Lost" will soon discover for himself, held very strong opinions regarding the superiority of man and the subordination of woman. These opinions sound extremely reactionary to most of us to-day. But his ideal of marriage and its responsibilities was singularly high and pure.

The first two divorce tracts were published in 1644, the remaining two in 1645. In January of the latter year Laud was executed ; in June the forces of the king met overwhelming defeat on the field of Naseby. Had Charles been resolute and wise, he might still have saved, even at this late hour, himself and the crown. But he was neither resolute nor wise. In his weak and shifty way he temporised and intrigued, and finally surrendering himself to the Scots was by them handed over to the

English Parliament. By this time contentions had arisen between Parliament and the Army ; the Army triumphed ; Charles was seized, formally tried, sentenced to death on January 27, 1649, and three days later beheaded. Then a Commonwealth was established. Cromwell, the man of the moment, rose into power, and, after a period of great confusion, was in 1653 proclaimed Lord Protector. It is necessary just to recall these events because of their bearings on the course of Milton's life. At first, intensely interested as he must have been in movements which obviously tended towards the consummation of his own political ideals, he held altogether aloof. Amid the distracting noises and conflicts he continued to be peacefully occupied with various literary projects—with designs for a Latin dictionary, for a History of England, for a system of theology, as well as with thoughts of his great epic. His home was now relieved of the burden of the Powell family, and his abandonment of tutorial work left him more leisure for meditation and writing. The way was thus clear for progress with his plans. But the execution of the king called him out of his retirement and turned his energies into the channel of public affairs. Two weeks after Charles's death on the scaffold, Milton published a pamphlet entitled " The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates," the thesis of which was " that it is lawful, and hath been held so, through all ages, for any who have the power to call to account a tyrant or wicked king, and after due

conviction, to depose and put him to death, if the ordinary magistrates have neglected or denied to do so." Manifestly, this was not an essay in abstractions, nor even a mere counter-blast against the Stuart doctrine of the "divine right of kings"; it was intended to justify the Army in Charles's trial and death, and, as Milton himself put it, "to reconcile the minds of the people to the event." It is easy to understand that it at once drew the attention of those now in authority to its writer. The result was that, through personal influences and greatly to his own surprise, the Council of State appointed Milton Latin secretary to the Committee for Foreign Affairs at a salary curiously fixed at the sum of £288 13s. 6½d. a year. We must not exaggerate the political importance of this position. His main business was that of clerk and translator; he turned English despatches into Latin, and foreign despatches into English, and sometimes acted as interpreter at audiences of foreign envoys. There his official duties ended. The legends which have grown up about his prominence and power in practical politics must therefore be dismissed, and particularly that of his personal connection with the Lord Protector. A popular picture represents him sitting at a table while Cromwell, standing near by, dictates to him. As Mr. Augustine Birrell has pointed out, this picture is "all imagination, nor is there anything to prove that Cromwell and Milton, the body and soul of English Republicanism, were ever in the

same room together, or exchanged words with one another." Certainly, Milton had nothing whatever to do, as a paid minor official, with shaping the policy of the Commonwealth. But in another capacity—as a publicist and the wielder of the most powerful pen in England—he rendered important assistance to the Government. The publication of a book of prayers and meditations, entitled "Eikon Basiliké, the Portraiture of his Sacred Majesty in his Solitude and Sufferings" (purporting to be the work of Charles himself, but now generally believed to have been written by a Dr. Gauden), greatly stimulated the reaction in popular feeling in favour of the late king. At the request of the Council of State Milton replied to this in his "Eikonoklastes." A more considerable task was entrusted to him when he was called upon to answer the Royalist attacks upon the Commonwealth made by a famous Dutch scholar, Salmasius, at the instigation of the late king's son, afterwards Charles II., who was then living at The Hague. This answer took the form of a "Defensio pro Populo Anglicano," or "Defence of the English People," which appeared in 1651. A rejoinder was issued in 1652 containing many scurrilous accusations against Milton himself. To this Milton replied in his "Defensio Secunda," or "Second Defence," in which, while arguing in support of the now established Protectorate, he enters into particulars concerning his own early life and conduct. Thus, as the various references which we have made to it

will have shown, this pamphlet has great value as a biographical document. These productions carried Milton's fame as a controversialist and writer of Latin prose far and wide through educated Europe. That they raise many questions of importance respecting the author's political opinions will of course be understood. But as we have here to do only with Milton the poet, and with other aspects of his work merely in relation to his poetical activity, such questions must now be left undiscussed. On one very general matter a single remark may be made. It is often regarded as paradoxical that so staunch a champion and so eloquent an apostle of freedom should have lent his support to the despotic rule of Cromwell. His position clearly needs justification. It can be justified only when it is considered in connection with the practical conditions of the time. His "choice lay," as Macaulay has admirably said, "not between Cromwell and liberty, but between Cromwell and the Stuarts. That Milton chose well no man can doubt who fairly compares the events of the protectorate with those of the thirty years which succeeded, the darkest and most disgraceful in the English annals." It must, moreover, be remembered that however willing he might be to co-operate for a time with those with whom he was in general agreement, Milton was altogether too independent and too progressive in thought to remain within the trammels of any particular system. The principles of the various sects and parties of his

age were only temporary resting-stages in his intellectual development. In the end he outgrew them all, and became a sect and a party by himself.

Meanwhile, in the midst of all these activities, a dreadful calamity had fallen upon him. His eyes had always been weak ; from boyhood up he had continually overstrained them by strenuous and unremitting study. At the time of his return from the Continent his sight was already beginning to fail ; by 1650 he had lost that of the left eye entirely ; and he was now warned by the doctor that absolute desistence from reading and writing was necessary if the use of the remaining eye was to be preserved. But he had just then undertaken his "Defence of the English People," and this at all costs he determined to finish. "The choice lay before me," he writes in his "Second Defence," "between dereliction of a supreme duty and loss of eyesight ; in such a case I could not listen to a physician, not if Æsculapius himself had spoken from his sanctuary ; I could not but obey that inward monitor, I know not what, that spake to me from Heaven. I considered with myself that many had purchased less good with worse ill, as they who give their lives to reap only glory, and I thereupon concluded to employ the little remaining eyesight I was to enjoy in doing this, the greatest service to the commonweal it was in my power to render." So Milton did his duty and paid the penalty. Early in 1653, when he was only forty-five years of age, he became

totally blind. Upon the varied consequences of this dire catastrophe to one still in the prime of manhood it is scarcely needful to dwell. But we must remember that in Milton's case the full tragedy of it can be realised only when account is taken of the fact that the great life-work upon which he had set his heart was as yet not even begun.

There are many passages in Milton's writings, both in prose and in verse, in which reference is made to the grievous affliction which God had thus laid upon him, and these are all touching and impressive as the expressions, now of simple sorrow over his forlorn state, now of resignation to the Divine will, now again, as Mr. Masson has put it, "of a proud conviction that God, in blinding his bodily eyes, had meant to enlarge and clear his inner vision, and make him one of the world's truest seers and prophets." One of the first, if not quite the first, of these autobiographical utterances is the following sonnet, which must have been written soon after complete darkness had closed in about him. In the nobility of its religious feeling, and especially in its supremely beautiful and oft-quoted conclusion, it may well stand beside the sonnet written "On his having attained the Age of Twenty-three."

ON HIS BLINDNESS

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent

To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest He, returning, chide;
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best; His state
Is kingly: thousands at His bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait."

Next to this we may place another sonnet, addressed to his friend Cyriack Skinner. This, as will be seen, was written on the third anniversary of the day from which he dated his total blindness. The contrast in tone between it and the one just quoted is very striking. In the one case we have the spirit of calm resignation; in the other, the sustaining consciousness of work well done in a great cause which was indeed worthy of the sacrifice which it had entailed.

TO CYRIACK SKINNER

Cyriack, this three years' day these eyes, though clear,
To outward view, of blemish or of spot,[1]
Bereft of light, their seeing have forgot;
Nor to their idle orbs doth sight appear
Of sun, or moon, or star, throughout the year,
Or man, or woman. Yet I argue not
Against Heav'n's Hand or Will, nor bate a jot
Of heart or hope; but still bear up and steer

[1] Perhaps it was a sense of his personal appearance which led Milton to emphasise this fact. He refers to it again in his "Second Defence," in which he says that his eyes, "externally uninjured . . . shine with an unclouded light, just like the eyes of one whose vision is perfect."

Right onward. What supports me, dost thou ask?
The conscience, Friend, to have lost them overplied
In Liberty's defence, my noble task,
Of which all Europe rings from side to side.
This thought might lead me through the world's
vain mask
Content though blind, had I no better guide.

One more of the poet's references to his affliction—a later one—must be added to these two sonnets. This is embedded in the magnificent invocation to light which opens the third book of "Paradise Lost." The entire passage must be reproduced (ll. 1–55).

Hail, holy Light, offspring of Heav'n first-born!
Or of th' Eternal coeternal beam
May I express Thee unblamed? since God is Light,
And never but in unapproachèd light
Dwelt from eternity—dwelt then in Thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence increate!
Or hear'st Thou rather pure Ethereal stream,
Whose fountain who shall tell? Before the Sun,
Before the Heavens, thou wert; and, at the voice
Of God, as with a mantle, didst invest
The rising World of waters dark and deep,
Won from the void and formless Infinite.
Thee I revisit now with bolder wing,
Escaped the Stygian Pool, though long detained
In that obscure sojourn, while in my flight,
Through utter and through middle darkness borne,
With other notes than to th' Orphean lyre
I sung of Chaos and eternal Night,
Taught by the Heav'nly Muse to venture down
The dark descent, and up to re-ascend,

Though hard and rare. Thee I revisit safe,
And feel Thy sovran vital Lamp ; but Thou
Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain
To find Thy piercing ray, and find no dawn :
So thick a drop serene hath quenched their orbs,
Or dim suffusion veiled. Yet not the more
Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt—
Clear spring or shady grove or sunny hill—
Smit with the love of sacred song ; but chief
Thee, Sion, and the flow'ry brooks beneath
That wash thy hallowed feet and warbling flow,
Nightly I visit : nor sometimes forget
Those other two equalled with me in fate—
So were I equalled with them in renown !—
Blind Thamyris and blind Mæonides,
And Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old ;
Then feed on thoughts that voluntary move
Harmonious numbers : as the wakeful bird
Sings darkling, and in shadiest covert hid
Tunes her nocturnal note. Thus with the year
Seasons return, but not to me return
Day, or the sweet approach of ev'n or morn,
Or sight of vernal bloom or summer's rose
Or flocks or herds or human face divine ;
But cloud instead, and ever-during dark,
Surrounds me : from the cheerful ways of men
Cut off, and, for the book of knowledge fair,
Presented with a universal blank
Of Nature's works, to me expunged and rased,
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.
So much the rather Thou, Celestial Light,
Shine inward, and the mind through all her
pow'rs
Irradiate ; there plant eyes ; all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

The chief event of Milton's private life during the years which immediately succeeded his loss of sight was his marriage in 1656 with Catharine Woodcock, the daughter of a Captain Woodcock of Hackney. That this second union brought him much quiet happiness seems certain. It was, however, destined to be very brief, for fifteen months later his wife died, leaving behind her a tender memory of the "love, sweetness, goodness" which "in her person shined." Notwithstanding his blindness, he continued to hold his secretarial position, though necessarily some of its duties had now to be performed by deputy, his principal assistant being the well-known patriot and poet Andrew Marvell. His energy as a controversialist and pamphleteer also remained unabated till the very end of the Protectorate, the last production of his "left hand"—his "Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth"—appearing in March 1660, only two months before the proclamation of Charles II. as king. This was a bold plea for a republican form of government. But whatever influence it might conceivably have exerted in different circumstances, it was, in fact, born out of date. The success of the Royalist cause in England was already assured.

We have now come to the end of the Commonwealth period in English history, and, with this, to the close of Milton's activities as prose-writer and public servant. That this long chapter in his life is full of interest on the

biographical side will scarcely be denied ; nor, however small may now seem to be the essential value of his contributions to the political and ecclesiastical discussions of his time, and however regrettable the passion and violence which disfigure so many of his pages, is any sympathetic student likely to blame him for turning aside at what he conceived to be the imperative call of duty, from the broad highways of pure literature into the tortuous byways of "noises and hoarse disputes." Yet, as we look back, we are inevitably most impressed by the enormous loss entailed by the course of action which he thus so resolutely pursued. Milton is now universally recognised as one of the supreme poets of all the world ; he had long nourished the ambition of producing some one great work in which his genius and his powers should find full and adequate expression ; steadily and patiently, from youth onward, he had been preparing himself by severe study and mental discipline for the accomplishment of his gigantic task. Yet through the twenty years of his middle manhood, while his genius was in its very prime, that task remained untouched. During a period almost as long as that which embraced the whole of Shakespeare's dramatic activity, the greatest of English poets, busy with controversies which have long been dead and with personal quarrels which only served to degrade him to the level of the pettiest of his adversaries and traducers, produced, all told, a score or so of sonnets. Rarely, if ever else-

where, does literary history record so deplorable a waste of genius and time.

Of the sonnets in question, two of a very intimately personal character have already been quoted. I will add two others the interest of which is public as well as biographical.

The first of these is specially noteworthy as the expression of the poet's feelings towards Cromwell. It was written in 1652, when Cromwell, not yet Protector, had just returned from his military expeditions in Ireland and Scotland, and its purpose is to call his attention to the religious conditions which awaited his consideration at home.

TO THE LORD GENERAL CROMWELL, May 1652

On the Proposals of Certain Ministers at the Committee for Propagation of the Gospel

Cromwell, our chief of men, who through a cloud
Not of war only, but detractions rude,
Guided by faith and matchless fortitude
To peace and truth thy glorious way hast ploughed,
And on the neck of crownèd Fortune proud
Hast reared God's trophies, and His work pursued,
While Darwen stream, with blood of Scots imbrued,
And Dunbar field resounds thy praises loud,
And Worcester's laureat wreath. Yet much remains
To conquer still: Peace hath her victories

No less renowned than War. New foes arise
Threat'ning to bind our souls with secular chains :
Help us to save free conscience from the paw
Of hireling wolves, whose gospel is their maw.

The remaining sonnet which I select for reproduction—the most powerful of all Milton's minor poems—was occasioned by the brutal persecution by the Duke of Savoy of the Protestant Waldenses or Vaudois. It fell to Milton's lot as Latin Secretary to formulate Cromwell's vigorous remonstrances. But this official protest did not satisfy him, and the present poem is the utterance of his personal horror and wrath. In its burning indignation at the ruthless cruelty which had been practised against a section of God's people, it recalls the language of some of the Psalms.

ON THE LATE MASSACRE IN PIEMONT

Avenge, O Lord, Thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold ;
Ev'n them who kept Thy Truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,
Forget not : in Thy Book record their groans
Who were Thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piemontese that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To Heav'n. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
O'er all th' Italian fields, where still doth sway
The triple tyrant, that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who, having learned Thy Way,
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

V

THE return of the Stuarts in the person of the "Merry Monarch" was followed by a tremendous reaction against Puritanism and its ideals. England plunged into what has been well described as the "mad orgy of the Restoration." Comus and his crew of wanton revellers were once more abroad in the land. The unclean spirit who for a time had been cast out had, as Macaulay says, taken "seven other spirits more wicked than himself," and "they entered in, and dwelt together, and the second possession was worse than the first." Together with the galling restraints which the Puritan *régime* had imposed, all moderation and decency were now thrown to the winds. The new king was an unabashed libertine; his Court was the most shameless ever known in England; in fashionable circles whatever was pure, honest, and of good report was openly scoffed at; infidelity and profligacy were the accepted marks of the fine gentleman and lady; the virtues which Puritanism had engendered were made topics of ribald jest; those who still cultivated them were sneered at as hypocrites. "The Restoration," as Mr. Mark Pattison puts it, "was a moral catastrophe. It was not that there wanted good men among the Churchmen, men as pious and virtuous as the Puritans whom they displaced. But the Royalists came back as the party of reaction, reaction of the spirit of the world against asceticism, of self-

indulgence against duty, of materialism against idealism. Servility, meanness, venality, time-serving, and a disbelief in virtue diffused themselves over the nation like a pestilential miasma, the depressing influence of which was heavy, even upon those souls which individually resisted the poison. The heroic age of England had passed away, not by gradual decay, by imperceptible degeneration, but in a year, in a single day, like the winter's snow in Greece."

To Milton, who, as it would seem, had to the end clung to the illusion that the course of national destiny might yet be averted, the Restoration was fraught with the element of personal danger. He had given the Royalists serious cause for hatred, and for the moment it was impossible to predict what the consequences might be. Charles landed at Dover on May 26, 1660, and at once made his way to London. Before the end of the month the blind poet had fled from his house in Petty France, and had sought refuge in concealment with a friend in Bartholomew Close. There, for a while, he lay in hiding. In June his books against the late king were ordered to be formally burned by the hands of the common hangman. A little later, he was himself arrested and placed in the custody of the Sergeant-at-Arms. But on June 15 the Commons directed his release; and henceforth he was a free man. Even now it is not quite clear to what cause or causes he owes his exemption from proscription and the disasters which overwhelmed so many of his

friends. It is said that Andrew Marvell acted vigorously and successfully in his behalf ; that Sir William Davenant constituted himself his protector ; that he found powerful allies in Secretary Morris and Sir Thomas Clarges ; that his blindness moved the pity even of his foes. But the fact seems to be that, whatever personal influences may also have been at work, Milton's escape from the consequences of his position as a republican and supporter of the regicides was chiefly due to his comparative insignificance as a political force. Yet while both his life and his liberty were thus spared, the Restoration bore very hardly upon him. Political changes entailed the total loss of all the money he had placed in Government securities ; other property had to be sacrificed ; his official salary terminated as a matter of course. All this meant a serious reduction in his income ; and, unfortunately, things were made worse by the mismanagement of his remaining investments, while his house in Bread Street was presently destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666. Hitherto Milton had always lived in comfortable freedom from pecuniary anxieties. These were now added to his other troubles—the petty miseries which soon invaded his home—his bitter disappointment over the political failure of the Puritan cause—his passionate sorrow over the ruin of the hopes and aspirations which he had nourished for his beloved country.

As soon as he found himself secure against further attack he took a little house in Holborn,

near Red Lion Square. Several changes of abode followed in rapid succession; and then, in 1664, he settled in Artillery Walk, Bunhill Fields. Here he lived till his death; though in 1665, to escape from the great plague which then raged in the city, he spent some months in a cottage which his young Quaker friend, Thomas Ellwood, found for him in the village of Chalfont St. Giles, Buckinghamshire.

It was to this last home that Milton took his third wife, Elizabeth Minshull, whom he married in February 1663. That this marriage was dictated by purely practical considerations cannot be questioned, but no adverse judgment upon it is therefore implied. His health was shaken; his blindness made him entirely dependent upon the attentions of others; he had three daughters, children of his first marriage, of whom the youngest was eight and the eldest only fourteen at the time of the Restoration, and who, as he very naturally felt, needed a woman's oversight and care. In these circumstances he took counsel with his friend and physician, Dr. Paget; marriage was decided upon; and it was on the doctor's recommendation that the choice of the new helpmeet was made. It proved to be a fortunate one, for Mistress Milton was a capable woman and an admirable housekeeper; and so far as domestic comfort was concerned, he had no further cause for complaint. It does not, indeed, appear that husband and wife had any intellectual interests in common, or that she gave him

assistance in his studies and literary work. But sympathy and an excellent understanding existed between them, and upon these it is a pleasure to dwell. I have already spoken of the strong theories which Milton held concerning the relations of the sexes and the essential inferiority of woman to man. Yet it must not therefore be supposed that he despised womanhood or thought of it in a low or contemptuous way. On the contrary, his attitude towards women was marked by the highest reverence and love. No reader of "Comus" can fail to perceive this; while, however much in "Paradise Lost" the supremacy of Adam is emphasised, the nobility and moral beauty of Eve's character make it equally clear. No finer testimony to womanhood is, indeed, to be found anywhere in our literature than that set forth in the words of Adam to the Angel:

"Yet when I approach
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems
And in herself complete, so well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do or say
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best.
All higher Knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded; Wisdom in discourse with her
Loses, discount'nanced, and like Folly shows;
Authority and Reason on her wait,
As one intended first, not after made
Occasion'lly; and, to consummate all,
Greatness of mind and Nobleness their seat
Build in her loveliest and create an awe
About her, as a guard angelic placed." [1]

[1] "Paradise Lost," VIII. 546-559.

I refer to this matter now because it comes up naturally in connection with the subject of Milton's third marriage. It has been suggested that in the portrayal of Eve he took his wife as a kind of painter's model. As regards physical features—as, for example, the " golden tresses " which she and Eve had in common—this can scarcely have been, for of course he never saw her. But it is more than possible that many of her qualities of mind and heart may have been deliberately incorporated by him in his study of ideal womanhood.

Unfortunately, the happiness which Milton thus found in his wife he quite failed to find in his daughters, who were, indeed, the chief cause of the domestic sorrow which still clouded his declining years. They figure in his life-story as hard and undutiful young women, who had no sympathy for him in his affliction, cared nothing for his genius, and rebelliously grumbled when he turned to them for help. A fair consideration of all the circumstances compels us, indeed, to temper the judgment which we are inclined to pass upon them. The fault was by no means wholly on their side. The great poet was self-absorbed, stern, exacting ; he had sadly neglected their education ; and yet, though he had not troubled in the least to develop their intellectual interests, he had been at immense pains to train them to read aloud to him in five or six languages, not one word of which they understood. That they should have grown restive beneath the burden of such monotonous

drudgery can be readily understood ; nor can we marvel that they should have resented their father's habit of calling upon them to write to his dictation at any hour of the day or even of the night, when the poetic impulse came upon him. Yet when all possible allowances have been made, their behaviour must still be pronounced unnatural and cruel. Whatever hardships their conditions involved, they might still have remembered that their father was blind, dependent, and in broken health and spirits, and have treated him with pity and forbearance. They chose rather to distress him not only by insubordination and neglect, but also by conduct which is even more obviously open to reproach ; for they connived with the maidservant "to cheat him in his marketings," and sold some of his books, behind his back, to the ragwoman. For some five or six years after his marriage, in spite of all the conciliatory efforts of his wife, this state of things continued, with ever-increasing bickerings and complaints. Then the strain became intolerable, and the girls, having been taught embroidery at his expense, went from their father's home into the world to earn their living on their own account. It is painful to have to linger over these sordid domestic details. They are, however, necessary to a complete understanding of the circumstances of Milton's life at the time when his greatest work was being done.

If, however, his daughters refused to give him the indispensable assistance of eye and hand,

there were not wanting those outside the family circle who were only too glad to take their place. Various young friends, who recognised his genius and revered his character, came to him regularly day by day, read to him, and acted as his amanuenses : among them, Cyriack Skinner, who has already been mentioned, and the young Quaker, Thomas Ellwood, in whom he found sympathetic companionship as well as practical help. It is from this Ellwood, and from one or two of his more casual visitors, who were numerous, that we learn a good deal that is interesting about Milton's personal habits during these last years of his life. Rising early—at four in summer, at five in winter—he began the day by listening to a chapter or two from the Hebrew Scriptures. "Then," says John Aubrey, in his account of the poet, "he contemplated. At seven his man"—his paid secretary—"came to him again, and then read to him and wrote till dinner." Exercise, chiefly in the form of walking in his garden, followed. The afternoon was commonly devoted to music, of which he was still passionately fond ; he played both the bass-viol and the organ, and sometimes he would sing himself, and sometimes his wife would sing to him. After this, he again listened to reading till six ; and between six and eight he received his friends. Conversation he greatly enjoyed ; his own talk, we are told, was "extreme pleasant" ; his youngest daughter, Deborah, the only one of his children who ever spoke of him with any

tenderness, declared that he was "delightful company, the soul of conversation," by reason of "a flow of subject, and an unaffected cheerfulness and civility." It is perhaps a little surprising to learn that a vein of humour often lightened his talk. At eight he took his supper—"of olives or some light thing," for in eating and drinking he was exceedingly abstemious—and, having smoked a pipe of tobacco and drunk a glass of water, he went to bed at nine. Such was his simple and quiet way of life. As to his mode of work, we know that the poetic inspiration visited him very fitfully. Sometimes he would lie awake the whole night, vainly labouring to make a single line; at other times, the verses came unsought and flowed fast and freely—the "easy" and "unpremeditated" verses of which he speaks. Night was often a favourite time with him for composition; but often, too, he would think out a passage, perhaps of twenty, or thirty, or forty lines, while walking up and down in the garden; and then he would return to the house that it might be put on paper by "any one that was near and could write." We have a memorable picture of the great poet dictating—"leaning backward obliquely in an easy chair, with his leg flung over the elbow of it." Another picture we are equally glad to remember has been left us by a Dr. Wright, a Dorsetshire clergyman. "He found John Milton, then growing old, in a small chamber, hung with rusty green, sitting in an elbow chair, and dressed neatly in black; pale,

but not cadaverous; his hands and fingers gouty and with chalk-stones. He used also to sit in a gray coarse cloth coat, at the door of his house near Bunhill Fields, in warm sunny weather to enjoy the fresh air. And so, as well as in his room, he received the visits of people of distinguished parts, as well as quality." Despite age, physical infirmities, and the mental sufferings which had left their mark upon him, he was still a strikingly handsome man, with his white hair falling over his shoulders and his sightless eyes shining with undiminished lustre. Nor, as Mr. Stopford Brooke has well reminded us, must we think of him in these last years as an object of our pity. "None can read 'Paradise Lost' without wonder at the fulness of creative power which must have made him happy"; while dwelling as he so largely did in the highest regions of thought and imagination, he had consolations which the petty miseries of private life and the evils rampant in the world outside were alike powerless to destroy.

For at length he had leisure and opportunity to carry out his long-cherished purpose, and to realise the noble ambition which the enforced occupations of so many years had compelled him to lay aside. The great epic, projected in all the freshness and vigour of youth, was in this period of failing health and bitter disappointment to become an accomplished fact.

Something must now be said about the history of Milton's design, for this will be found to throw much light for us not only upon the

development of his character, but even upon the significance of "Paradise Lost" itself.

As early as 1637, it will be remembered, he had confided to his friend Charles Diodati that he had already fixed his mind upon a great poetic task and was silently but sedulously preparing himself for its accomplishment. The journey to Italy was for him only one more stage in this necessary preparation; even amid the distractions of travel the "inward promptings" of which he was conscious "grew daily" upon him; he held steadily to his proud belief "that by labour and intense study (which I take to be my portion in this life) joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die."[1] But meanwhile he was casting about for a theme. At first, as was inevitable with one of his enormous reading, the range of possibilities seemed almost bewilderingly wide. In a manuscript notebook preserved among the Milton relics in Trinity College, Cambridge, there is a list, dating probably from 1640 or 1641, which contains the titles of—in some cases, jottings for—ninety-nine different subjects, set down evidently as they occurred to him and for further consideration. Of these sixty-one are Scriptural, the remaining thirty-eight being taken from the legendary history of Britain. At the moment it would appear that his interest was gravitating strongly in the latter direction,

[1] "Apology for Smectymnuus."

and especially toward the romantic subject of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. This is shown in a hint in a Latin poem addressed in 1638 or 1639 to his Italian friend Manso, and even more in a passage in the elegy on Diodati ("Epitaphium Damonis"):

I too—for strangely my pipe for some time past had been sounding
Strains of an unknown strength—
I have a theme of the Trojans cruising our southern headlands
Shaping to song, and the realm of Imogen, daughter of Pandras,
Brennus and Arvirach, dukes, and Bren's bold brother, Belinus,
Then the Armorican settlers under the laws of the Britons,
Ay, and the womb of Ingraine fatally pregnant with Arthur,
Uther's son.[1]

But however favourably he may for a time have thought of the Arthurian legends as a theme for an English heroic poem, it was not long before he set them definitely aside and fixed his choice upon the Fall of Man. Four drafts, evidently written out before 1642, remain to testify to the prominence which this subject had already assumed in his thought. I here reproduce the last and fullest of them:

ADAM UNPARADISED[2]:—The Angel Gabriel, either descending or entering—showing, since the

[1] I quote from Masson's translation of the elegy.
[2] It may be noted that the title which heads the third draft is "Paradise Lost." The first two drafts are without titles.

globe is created, his frequency as much on Earth as in Heaven—describes Paradise. Next the Chorus, showing the reason of his coming—to keep his watch, after Lucifer's rebellion, by the command of God—and withal expressing his desire to see and know more concerning this excellent and new creature, Man. The Angel Gabriel, as by his name signifying a Prince of Power, passes by the station of the Chorus, and desired by them, relates what he knew of Man, as the creation of Eve, with their love and marriage.—After this, Lucifer appears, after his overthrow; bemoans himself; seeks revenge upon Man. The Chorus prepares resistance at his first approach At last, after discourse of enmity on either side, he departs; whereat the Chorus sing of the battle and victory in Heaven against him and his accomplices, as before, after the first Act, was sung a hymn of the Creation.—Here again may appear Lucifer, relating and consulting on what he had done to the destruction of Man. Man next and Eve, having been by this time seduced by the Serpent, appear confusedly, covered with leaves. Conscience, in a shape, accuses him; Justice cites him to the place whither Jehovah called for him. In the meantime the Chorus entertains the stage and is informed by some Angel of the manner of the Fall. Here the Chorus bewails Adam's fall—Adam and Eve return and accuse one another; but especially Adam lays the blame to his wife—is stubborn in his offence. Justice appears, reasons with him, convinces him. The Chorus admonishes Adam, and bids him beware Lucifer's example of impenitence.—The Angel is sent to banish them out of Paradise; but, before, causes to pass before his eyes, in shapes, a masque of all the evils of this life and world. He is humbled, relents, despairs. At last appears Mercy, comforts him, promises him the Messiah; then calls in Faith, Hope,

Charity; instructs him. He repents; gives God the glory, submits to his penalty. The Chorus briefly concludes.

From this sketch it will be seen that at the outset Milton conceived his subject in the form of a drama—one might say, of a gigantic mystery-play, were it not that the scheme was modelled on the strict lines of Greek tragedy, after adopted in "Samson Agonistes." Parts at least of Satan's address to the sun in the fourth book of "Paradise Lost" (lines 32 ff.) survive as a fragment of this projected dramatic version. His abandonment of it was only in consonance with his original intention to write a great English epic poem.

In the ninth book of "Paradise Lost" there is a long digression (lines 13-47), in which Milton pauses in his narrative to speak of his hesitation in regard to his subject-matter, of his tardiness in beginning his poem, and of his reasons for selecting a sacred instead of a romantic theme. The whole passage is full of autobiographical interest, and may here fittingly be reproduced. It will be seen that he boldly pits his own argument against those of the "Iliad" and the "Æneid," and that he refers his ultimate choice to the ingrained qualities of his nature. Explaining that he has now to enter upon the tragic part of his action, he proceeds:

> Sad task! yet argument
> Not less but more heroic than the wrath
> Of stern Achilles on his foe pursued

Thrice fugitive about Troy wall ; or rage
Of Turnus for Lavinia disespoused ;
Or Neptune's ire, or Juno's, that so long
Perplexed thy Greek and Cytherea's son ;
If answerable style I can obtain
Of my celestial Patroness, who deigns
Her nightly visitation unimplored,
And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires
Easy my unpremeditated verse :
Since first this subject for heroic song
Pleased me, long choosing and beginning late,
Not sedulous by nature to indite
Wars, hitherto the only argument
Heroic deemed ; chief mast'ry to dissect
With long and tedious havoc fabled knights,
In battles feigned : the better fortitude
Of patience and heroic martyrdom
Unsung ; or to describe races and games,
Or tilting furniture, imblazon'd shields,
Impresses quaint, caparisons and steeds,
Bases and tinsel trappings, gorgeous knights
At joust and tournament ; then marshalled feast
Served up in hall with sewers and seneshals :
The skill of artifice or office mean,
Not that which justly gives heroic name
To person or to poem. Me, of these
Nor skilled nor studious, higher argument
Remains ; sufficient of itself to raise
That name, unless an age too late, or cold
Climate, or years, damp my intended wing
Depressed ; and much they may, if all be mine,
Nor hers who brings it nightly to my ear.

The full description of the romantic machinery and detail which would have entered into the

texture of the poem which he had long since determined not to write is a capital illustration of Milton's digressive habit and delight in drawing upon his stores of learning, while perhaps at the same time it suggests that he looked back with some regret upon his abandoned theme. Possibly he even now recalled with pleasure his early readings in romantic literature—the " throngs of knights and barons bold " who had passed across the pages of many a well-loved book—the mighty battles they had fought—the gorgeous tournaments in which they had taken part beneath the bright eyes of ladies who had rained influence and judged the prize. But such regret, if indeed he felt any, was only transitory. If the mere fact that while still a young man he had turned away from the seductions of chivalrous love and adventure to matters of infinitely more serious import was sure proof of his fast-growing earnestness, still more certain is it that, whatever might have been the case with him in earlier years, any theme having less moral and religious significance than the one chosen would have been, at the date when he actually addressed himself to his task, an absolute impossibility. The struggles and disappointments of the intervening period, its noble efforts and its bitter regrets, had necessarily exercised a profound influence upon his mind ; and to one of his temper, who had fought for the cause of God and righteousness and had seen that cause overwhelmed with disaster, it would have

seemed rank impiety to waste the few remaining years of his life and the little strength which was still left to him in spinning pretty verses about the amours and adventures of the fabled heroes of King Arthur's court. There was, indeed, only one subject which appeared to fit the critical hour and the mood in which he now surveyed the course of history and looked far forward across the confusions of the present into the ages to come. That was the subject upon which years before he had fixed his mind, but which had now unfolded to him depths of meaning then unsuspected. Human sin, of which he had the terrible evidences everywhere about him—God's redeeming grace, in which he still trusted to bring good out of evil,

> And evil turn to good—more wonderful
> Than that which by creation first brought forth
> Light out of Darkness— [1]

here indeed was matter which might well engage his thought and call out all his creative powers. And so he undertook to sing "of man's first disobedience" and its far-reaching consequences, and even while doing so, to "justify the ways of God" and the divine ordering of the world. It was a daring enterprise—an enterprise to be undertaken only by such a poet and at such a time.

Let me insist that the experiences of that long interval during which his poetic vein had seemed to be exhausted counted enormously in

[1] "Paradise Lost," XII. 471-473.

the making of "Paradise Lost." This is a fact which must never be overlooked. I have myself spoken of Milton's activities in middle life as a deplorable waste of time; but in so doing I was thinking only of actual production and immediate results. The same facts may, however, be regarded from quite a different point of view. There are critics who regret that the Milton of "Paradise Lost" is no longer the Milton of "Il Penseroso," of "Comus," of "Lycidas"; who hold that his passionate preoccupation with prose and controversy and public affairs did much to destroy his spontaneity and to injure the pure artist in him. Well, we may admit that the freshness and bloom of his earlier work are to some extent lacking in that of his later period. But meanwhile the poet has gained immensely by his contact with life—has gained in depth, range, moral grasp, and the peculiar power which was to enable him to soar to the heights of his "great argument." Had Milton never passed through the stress and turmoil, the conflicts and sorrows, of his long years of struggle and disappointment, "Paradise Lost" might indeed have been written; but we may be sure that, better or worse, it would not have been the "Paradise Lost" that we possess to-day.

We now understand the circumstances in which Milton addressed himself to the composition of his great heroic poem. Just when he actually began it is doubtful. It is thought that a start was made as early as the year of

Cromwell's death—1658. But if so, the disasters which followed must have compelled him to lay it once more aside. It was only when the personal perils which came with the Restoration were over, and, assured of safety, he was permitted to retire into obscurity and peace, that the opportunity was afforded for him to take up his task in earnest. There is a striking reference to these conditions in the well-known passage in which he describes himself as

> fall'n on evil days—
> On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues,
> In darkness, and with dangers compassed round
> And solitude.[1]

Then he worked upon his poem steadily and systematically, though meanwhile he had various other large undertakings in hand—a treatise on theology, a history of England, the collection of materials for a Latin dictionary. Though here again we are in some uncertainty, it is probable that the first draft was finished about 1663, and the revised and perfected manuscript in the summer of 1665. The Plague and the Great Fire delayed publication ; but at the end of 1666 Milton sent the poem to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the official licenser of religious literature. The Archbishop, however, performed his functions by deputy, and the work actually received the *imprimatur* of one of his chaplains, who, indeed, baulked a

[1] "Paradise Lost," VII. 25-28.

little at certain passages in it,[1] but finally allowed it to pass without alteration. Very possibly he thought, as Mr. Mark Pattison suggests, that it was merely a poem "for sectaries, which would never be heard of at Court, or among the wits," and that it was thus really of very little consequence what it contained. That such a poem should have to run the gauntlet of a petty, third-rate ecclesiastic, and this at the time when the filthy comedies of the Restoration playwrights were befouling the stage without interference or protest from the authorities—this is surely not the least remarkable fact in the external history of "Paradise Lost." Then, in April 1667, arrangements were made for publication, and the poem finally appeared in the early autumn of that year. According to the terms of the agreement, Milton was to receive five pounds for the manuscript and an additional five pounds with each successive edition: the edition being reckoned at 1300 copies. He lived to acknowledge two such payments—or ten pounds in all for the greatest poem in English literature. It is true that the relative value of a pound in his day was much greater than it is in ours; but even so, the grotesque inadequacy of the remuneration is sufficiently apparent. Yet I agree with Mr. Mark Pattison; there is no cause for us to lament; it is "better to know that the noblest monument of English letters had no money value, than to

[1] Especially the phrase "with fear of change Perplexes monarchs," in I. 598, 599, which, of course, seemed to savour of odious republicanism!

think of it as having been paid for at a pound a line," and to compare this with the prices received, as gossiping journals often tell us, by certain of our popular novelists for their lucubrations.

We are to regard "Paradise Lost," then, as substantially the work of the early years of the Restoration; when Charles II. sat on the throne which his immediate predecessors had disgraced, and was industriously disgracing it even more flagrantly in his turn; when the Court was given over to shameless living; when, even among the English people at large, there were, as we have seen, a weakening of the moral fibre, and a decline in the old heroic temper of faith and idealism. Against the background of such an age "Paradise Lost" stands out, like some great mountain peak, in solitary grandeur. I think it well that in reading the poem we should always keep in mind the conditions, personal and national, under which it was written.

In order to realise the profoundly religious spirit in which Milton embarked upon his task, and by which his poem is animated throughout, it is enough to recall the magnificent opening lines. It was a regular practice with the epic poets to begin by invoking the Muse. Arising in the first instance out of a genuine belief in poetic inspiration, this practice had long since degenerated into mere pedantic formality. Milton adopts it, but in his hands it once more assumes its original life and meaning. His appeal for help and guidance is made to no stereotyped abstraction of a now dead

mythology. He turns instead to the Heavenly Muse—the Muse of sacred revelation ; [1] nay, more : as one who feels himself dedicated to labours which call for something beyond human powers, he boldly lifts his voice in prayer to the Holy Spirit for instruction and support. This sublime exordium is not a mere bit of polite convention. It is an invocation in the religious as well as in the poetic sense of the term.

Of Man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree whose mortal taste
Brought Death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
Sing, Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That shepherd who first taught the chosen seed
In the beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of Chaos : or, if Sion hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
Fast by the oracle of God, I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.
And chiefly thou, O Sp'rit, that dost prefer
Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou know'st : Thou from the first
Wast present, and, with mighty wings outspread,
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss
And mad'st it pregnant. What in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support,

[1] Compare the opening lines of VII.

That to the highth of this great Argument
I may assert Eternal Pi ovidence,
And justify the ways of God to Men.

These opening lines, it will be seen, not only contain the invocation, but also, in epic fashion, announce the theme. It is "of man's first disobedience" that the poet has undertaken to sing. Yet it is important to remember that this theme has larger bearings than this first statement might lead us to anticipate. The Fall of Man as the origin of evil—that is the immediate subject. But it is so treated as to become universalised; the tragedy of Eden is conceived as the tragedy of the whole human race; the poem, in fact, sets forth the eternal conflict between God and Satan alike throughout history and in the soul of each individual man. It is thus easy to understand why Milton's attention turned particularly to the forms which this eternal conflict had assumed in his own time; for these forms, while specially fresh and vivid to his imagination, were after all only concrete illustrations, the more significant because so near at hand, of the gigantic truths which every page of history would be found to teach. If Satan is everlastingly doing battle against the kingdom of God and His righteousness, it is always upon the same issues and with the same forces that the battle has to be waged by him. Recent events in England had once more proved this; and Milton wrote of the early stages in the unending conflict with these

recent events clearly in mind. We see this in the great debate in Book II.—a section of the poem in which Milton's dramatic powers are shown at their very highest. Four speakers take part. Moloch, "the strongest and the fiercest spirit that fought in Heaven, now fiercer by despair," represents Brute Force, and advocates open war. Belial, beautiful in person, outwardly attractive, but "than whom a spirit more lewd fell not from Heaven, nor one more gross to love vice for itself," represents intellect and culture divorced from righteousness, as in the Cavalier; he expounds the policy of indifference. Mammon is the type of Godless wealth, and argues for the founding of a new kingdom, the kingdom of Mammon, as a rival to the kingdom of God. Beelzebub, "majestic though in ruin," wise in all the wisdom of the world, stands for Godless state-craft and ambition, and urges that the rebels shall seek to thwart God's purposes by cunning and strategy—a proposal which is applauded and accepted by the infernal council. In all this, it is evident, Milton, while writing of the disastrous overthrow of the Puritan cause immediately in mind, is also portraying at large those chief forces of evil—brutality, the insidious influences of unmoralised culture, the spirit of Mammonism, and the statesmanship which knows nothing of righteousness [1]—which are always most effective in maintaining and spreading Satan's kingdom of

[1] Mr. Stopford Brooke, by whom this part of the subject has been admirably treated, suggests that we may, perhaps, even trace in Beelzebub the lineaments of Charles's evil counsellor, Strafford.

darkness among men. And then, that the contrast may be pointed, Milton later introduces the Seraph Abdiel, "than whom none with more zeal adored the Deity, and divine commands obeyed," and who stands forth, when Satan stirred rebellion in Heaven—

> Among the faithless faithful only he;
> Among innumerable false unmoved,
> Unshak'n, unseduced, unterrified,
> His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal.[1]

There we have the portrait of the unbending Puritan of Milton's time and of the righteous man of all times and places who, amid the temptations and persecutions, the hardships and the trials of the Satanic kingdom on earth, holds fast to God.

It must also be noted that in yet another way Milton's poem reaches out beyond the limits of its nominal subject. By the use of a device taken directly from Virgil—the device of "historical anticipation," as it is sometimes called[2]—matter is incorporated which, while lying far outside the story of Eden and the Fall, is none the less essential to the completion of the poet's plan. In a vision Adam is permitted to foresee the awful consequences of his sin in all the corruption of the world till the time of the great Flood; after which, Michael takes up the theme, sketches for him the history of

[1] V. 894-897.

[2] It is employed a number of times in the "Æneid": notably in the designs on the Shield of Æneas (Book viii.), and in the prophecy of Anchises concerning the future greatness and glory of Rome (Book vi.).

mankind onward till the coming of the Saviour, and outlines the work of Redemption presently to be accomplished. Thus, though the specific text is the loss of Paradise, the closing emphasis is not on the triumph of evil. It is upon the infinite grace and goodness of God in the redemption of fallen man. Then the poet links his universal theme with the question of individual conduct and destiny ; and Adam is made to learn the great lesson, which for Milton is the supreme truth of all human life—that happiness on earth consists in willing dependence upon God's power, trust in His goodness, obedience to His will. Michael having ended his speech,

Thus Adam last replied :
" How soon hath thy prediction, Seër blest,
Measured this transient World, the race of Time,
Till Time stand fixed ! Beyond is all abyss,
Eternity, whose end no eye can reach.
Greatly instructed I shall hence depart,
Greatly in peace of thought, and have my fill
Of knowledge, what this vessel can contain ;
Beyond which was my folly to aspire.
Henceforth I learn that to obey is best,
And love with fear the only God ; to walk
As in His presence, ever to observe
His providence and on Him sole depend,
Merciful over all His works, with good
Still overcoming evil, and by small
Accomplishing great things, by things deemed weak
Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
By simply meek ; that suff'ring for Truth's sake
Is fortitude to highest victory,

And to the faithful Death the Gate of Life—
Taught this by His example, whom I now
Acknowledge my Redeemer ever blest."
To whom thus also th' Angel last replied :
" This having learned, thou hast attained the sum
Of wisdom : hope no high'r, though all the stars
Thou knew'st by name, and all the ethereal pow'rs,
All secrets of the Deep, all Nature's works,
Or works of God in Heav'n, Air, Earth, or Sea,
And all the riches of this World enjoy'dst,
And all the rule, one empire. Only add
Deeds to thy Knowledge answerable ; add Faith,
Add Virtue, Patience, Temperance ; add Love,
By name to come called Charity, the soul
Of all the rest : then wilt thou not be loth
To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
A paradise within thee, happier far." [1]

In the foregoing paragraphs I have tried to indicate something of the greatness of " Paradise Lost " when considered only on the side of its subject-matter and spirit ; and let me add that such greatness remains even though for many modern readers much of Milton's theology is a thing of the past. But there is another point of view from which the poem has to be regarded. It has to be studied as a work of art. " Paradise Lost," as I have elsewhere put it, " belongs in plan and structure to a particular and well-defined kind of poetry—to the kind we call ' epic ' poetry ; it was written by a man of enormous scholarship who sought to make his own work accord with the technical principles of the great epics of classical antiquity, and who

[1] XII. 552–587.

not only adopted these as his models, but also drew continually upon them for various details—incidents, metaphors, similes, turns of speech. 'Paradise Lost' has therefore to be studied as an example of the epic; its plan and composition have to be examined from the standpoint of epic art; it has in particular to be compared with its acknowledged models. Milton's indebtedness to literature in a wider sense has also to be considered—to the Bible, the Greek dramatists, Ariosto, Tasso, Spenser; and while his countless borrowings are duly noted, special attention will have to be paid to the use to which these borrowings are put by 'the greatest of plagiarists,' and to the skill with which he adapts them and so makes them his own." [1]

Within the limited space of this little book I cannot go into further details regarding this part of our subject. I must content myself with having suggested some of the lines of inquiry which the student of "Paradise Lost" must follow up on his own account. There is, however, one point upon which I must pause to lay stress. We have learned that, while throughout Milton was both Puritan and humanist—a child at once of the Reformation and the Renaissance—the maturing of his genius was accompanied

[1] "An Introduction to the Study of Literature," pp. 75, 76. As a matter of detail it should be noted that "Paradise Lost" is the first important non-dramatic poem in English in blank verse. Milton's prefixed justification of this should be read. The style and versification of the poem throughout form a separate subject for study; as Milton is still our greatest master of all the varied resources of what is surely, with the possible exception of the Greek hexameter, the finest and most flexible measure that any literature has yet possessed.

by a steady growth of the Puritan at the expense of the humanist in his character and work. Yet, as I have been solicitous to show, it is altogether a mistake to suppose that in his case the Puritan destroyed the humanist. Completely as the pagan spirit of the Renaissance finally disappeared from his mind, its learning, its art, its passion for beauty remained, though these were now made subordinate and ancillary to his Puritanism. This is strikingly shown in "Paradise Lost," in which, as we now see, the forms of classic art are employed—and with finer effect than anywhere else in modern literature—for a Christian instead of a classic subject. It is therefore evident that we have to introduce some qualification into the oft-reiterated statement which describes Milton as the greatest exponent of Puritanism in English literature. If we want Puritanism in its simplest expression and uncomplicated by any other influences, it is rather to Bunyan than to Milton that we should turn; for in form and style as well as in matter and thought the inspired tinker derived from Puritanism and belonged entirely to it. Milton adds the Renaissance artist to the Puritan thinker—the Hellenic love of knowledge and beauty to the Hebraic zeal for righteousness; and if in places the combination gives rise to some incongruity, it is none the less a special and distinctive feature of his master-work. On the whole, there is little to find fault with in the dictum that in Milton the Hellenic and Hebraic spirits are harmonised

more completely than in any other poet in the world's literature.

I must now leave the student to turn to "Paradise Lost" for himself. He will not find it easy reading, nor uniformly interesting reading. The style is often extremely involved —"contorted or gnarled," as Masson phrased it; ellipses, inversions, Latinisms abound; Milton's erudition, as I have already said, makes extortionate demands upon us; there are many sandy places in the poem—long, dreary wastes of theological argument and philosophical discussion. But perseverance will inevitably bring its own reward; for alike in design and execution "Paradise Lost" is—I do not say the most vital or the most attractive poem for the modern reader, but—incomparably the greatest poem in our language.

We have seen that "Paradise Lost" reaches out beyond its nominal theme and includes, in the form of prophecy, the poet's interpretation of the ultimate defeat of Satan and the salvation of the human race. It is in the highest degree probable that Milton had originally intended to leave the matter there. A suggestion from the outside (as it would seem) caused him to change his mind; and four years after the appearance of "Paradise Lost" he published a sequel in four books, "Paradise Regained."

We have an account of the genesis of this poem in the autobiography of Thomas Ellwood. That faithful friend tells us how one day in 1665 Milton handed him the manuscript of "Para-

dise Lost " with the request that he would take it away with him, read it at his leisure, and pronounce judgment upon it. He then proceeds :

After I had, with the best attention, read it through, I made him another visit, and returned him his book, with due acknowledgment of the favour he had done me in communicating it to me. He asked how I liked it, and what I thought of it ; which I modestly, but freely, told him ; and after some further discourse about it, I pleasantly said to him, " Thou hast said much here of Paradise lost ; but what hast thou to say of Paradise found ? " He made me no answer, but sate some time in a muse, then brake off that discourse, and fell upon another subject. After the sickness was over, and the city well cleansed and become safely habitable again, he returned hither. And when, afterwards, I went to wait on him there (which I seldom failed of doing, whenever my occasions drew me to London), he showed me his second poem, called " Paradise Regained," and in a pleasant tone said to me, " This is owing to you ; for you put it into my head by the question you put to me at Chalfont, which before I had not thought of." [1]

Though Milton himself was very impatient when he heard his new poem underrated—he never, by the way, expressed his preference for it to " Paradise Lost," as the common saying runs—the modern reader cannot fail to be impressed by a sense of flagging powers when he turns to it from the previous work. " Paradise Regained " has little to remind us of the

[1] " The History of the Life of Thomas Ellwood " (1714), pp. 246, 247.

tremendous creative energy, the marvellous imagination, the sustained intellectual force, the sweep and harmony of style, with which "Paradise Lost" has made us familiar. Milton here gives little rein to his invention, since, as Mark Pattison notes, the whole poem is scarcely more than an amplified paraphrase of the narrative of the Temptation in the synoptical Gospels; there are few scenes or descriptions to arrest or surprise; the manner is generally pedestrian; the language and versification plain and severe almost to baldness. None the less, overshadowed as it is by its mighty forerunner, slight and unequal as it must necessarily seem by contrast, "Paradise Regained" has dignity and nobility, some great moments, and here and there passages of rare homely tenderness and charm. One question connected with the very foundations of it has puzzled many readers: Why should Milton call his poem "Paradise Regained" when the substance of it is provided only by the temptation of Christ in the wilderness? Surely, it is said, the title is a misnomer; surely any full treatment of the subject should have comprised the entire work of redemption. The answer seems to be that in the poet's mind temptation was balanced against temptation; and as in the one case Paradise had been lost by the weakness and disobedience of man, so in the other case, through the strength and righteousness of the "greater man," Satan was effectively defeated, and our fallen race restored to "the blissful

seat." Earlier critics wondered why the poem ended where it does, and even suggested that it is really incomplete. But as Masson insists, " by no protraction of the poem over the rest of Christ's life . . . could Milton have brought the story to the consummation thought desirable. The *virtual* deliverance of the world from the power of Satan and his crew may be represented as achieved in Christ's life on earth, and Milton represents it as achieved in Christ's first encounter with Satan at the outset of His ministry ; but the *actual* or *physical* expulsion of the evil spirits out of their usurped world into their own nether realm was left a matter of prophecy or promise, and "—the point is very important—" was certainly not regarded by Milton as having been accomplished even at the time when he wrote. Such completion of the poem, therefore, as could be given to it by working it on to this historical consummation, was impossible. But, in short, by publishing the poem as it stands, Milton certified its completeness according to his own idea of the theme."

From the autobiographical point of view by far the most interesting portion of " Paradise Regained " is to be found in the narrative of the last temptation (in Milton's order) in Book IV. Satan, thrice repulsed, now proceeds to attack the Saviour on the intellectual side. He conjures up before him the old Greek capital of arts and philosophy, and the description of Athens which follows is in Milton's noblest style :

"Look once more, ere we leave this specular mount,
Westward, much nearer by south-west; behold
Where on th' Ægean shore a city stands,
Built nobly, pure the air, and light the soil:
Athens, the Eye of Greece, Mother of Arts
And Eloquence, native to famous wits
Or hospitable, in her sweet recess,
City or suburban, studious walks and shades.
See there the olive grove of Academe,
Plato's retirement, where the Attic bird
Trills her thick-warbled notes the summer long;
There flow'ry hill Hymettus, with the sound
Of bees' industrious murmur, oft invites
To studious musing; there Ilissus rolls
His whisp'ring stream. Within the walls then view
The schools of ancient sages: his who bred
Great Alexander to subdue the world,
Lyceum there, and painted Stoa next;
There shalt Thou hear and learn the secret pow'r
Of Harmony, in tones and numbers hit
By voice or hand; and various measured verse,
Æolian charms and Dorian lyric odes,
And his who gave them breath, but higher sung,
Blind Melesigenes, thence Homer called,
Whose poem Phœbus challenged for his own:
Thence what the lofty grave tragedians taught
In Chorus or Iambic, teachers best
Of moral prudence, with delight received
In brief sententious precepts, while they treat
Of fate, and chance, and change in human life,
High actions and high passions best describing:
Thence to the famous orators repair,
Those ancient, whose resistless eloquence
Wielded at will that fierce democratie,
Shook th' arsenal, and fulmined over Greece

To Macedon and Artaxerxes' throne :
To sage Philosophy next lend Thine ear,
From Heav'n descended to the low-roofed house
Of Socrates ; see there his tenement,
Whom well inspired the oracle pronounced
W'sest of men ; from whose mouth issued forth
Mellifluous streams, that watered all the schools
Of Academics old and new, with those
Surnamed Peripatetics, and the sect
Epicurean, and the Stoic severe :
These here revolve, or, as Thou lik'st, at home,
Till time mature Thee to a kingdom's weight ;
These rules will render Thee a king complete
Within Thyself, much more with empire joined."

Here we are in the full spirit of the Renaissance, with its love of Greek philosophy, poetry, art ; and it is noteworthy that this love is now presented as a temptation, and is expressed through Satan's mouth. And what does the Saviour reply ? He says :

" Think not but that I know these things ; or think
I know them not ; not therefore am I short
Of knowing what I ought : he who receives
Light from Above, from the Fountain of Light,
No other doctrine needs, though granted true ;
But these are false, or little else but dreams,
Conjectures, fancies, built on nothing firm.
The first and wisest of them all professed
To know this only, that he nothing knew ;
The next to fabling fell, and smooth conceits ;
A third sort doubted all things, though plain sense ;
Others in virtue placed felicity,
But virtue joined with riches and long life ;
In corporal pleasure he, and careless ease ;

The Stoic last in philosophic pride,
By him called virtue ; and his virtuous man,
Wise, perfect in himself, and all possessing
Equal to God, oft shames not to prefer,
As fearing God nor man, contemning all
Wealth, pleasure, pain or torment, death and life,
Which when he lists he leaves, or boasts he can,
For all his tedious talk is but vain boast,
Of subtle shifts conviction to evade.
Alas ! What can they teach and not mislead,
Ignorant of themselves, of God much more,
And how the world began, and how Man fell
Degraded by himself, on Grace depending ?
Much of the Soul they talk, but all awry,
And in themselves seek Virtue, and to themselves
All glory arrogate, to God give none ;
Rather accuse Him under usual names,
Fortune and Fate, as one regardless quite
Of mortal things. Who therefore seeks in these
True Wisdom, finds her not ; or, by delusion,
Far worse, her false resemblance only meets,
An empty cloud. However, many books,
Wise men have said, are wearisome ; who reads
Incessantly, and to his reading brings not
A sp'rit and judgment equal or superior,
(And what he brings what needs he elsewhere seek ?
Uncertain and unsettled still remains,
Deep versed in books and shallow in himself,
Crude or intoxicate, collecting toys
And trifles for choice matters, worth a sponge,
As children gath'ring pebbles on the shore.
Or, if I would delight My private hours
With music or with poem, where so soon
As in our native language can I find
That solace ? All our Law and story strewed
With hymns, our psalms with artful terms inscribed,

Our Hebrew songs and harps, in Babylon
That pleased so well our victors' ear, declare
That rather Greece from us these arts derived ;
Ill imitated, while they loudest sing
The vices of their deities, and their own,
In fable, hymn, or song, so pers'nating
Their gods ridiculous, and themselves past shame.
Remove their swelling epithets, thick laid
As varnish on a harlot's cheek, the rest,
Thin sown with aught of profit or delight,
Will far be found unworthy to compare
With Sion's songs, to all true tastes excelling,
Where God is praised aright, and God-like men,
The Holiest of Holies, and His Saints,
(Such are from God inspired, not such from thee),
Unless where moral virtue is expressed
By light of Nature, not in all quite lost.
Their orators thou then extoll'st, as those
The top of eloquence ; statists indeed,
And lovers of their country, as may seem ;
But herein to our Prophets far beneath,
As men Divinely taught, and better teaching
The solid rules of civil government,
In their majestic unaffected style,
Than all the orat'ry of Greece and Rome.
In them is plainest taught and easiest learnt
What makes a nation happy and keeps it so,
What ruins kingdoms, and lays cities flat ;
These only with our Law best form a king."

Here is the stern and uncompromising answer of the Puritan to all the seductions of pagan beauty and lore. It is strange indeed to find the great scholar-poet in this mood of recantation : his attack upon the classical literature

which he had once loved so passionately, and which had done so much to fashion his own art—his denunciation of the Greek philosophy which he had once so justly honoured—his protest in favour of extreme narrowness in intellectual interests : these have a curious and even a pathetic significance. Mr. Stopford Brooke says that in this speech "Milton put only one side of his mind into the mouth of Christ ; the other side we have had already in the mouth of Satan." Possibly so. But such a division of the argument is surely a striking evidence of the supremacy of the Puritan in him at the time.

The volume in which "Paradise Regained" appeared in 1671 contained another production of great importance—"Samson Agonistes" (that is, "Samson the Wrestler"). In this Milton returned to the dramatic form which he had abandoned in favour of the epic in the writing of "Paradise Lost" : the work being modelled faithfully upon the lines of Greek tragedy. A prefatory note—"Of that Sort of Dramatic Poem called Tragedy"—sets forth his apology for experimenting in a kind of literature which the Puritans had always denounced and which the fearful profligacy of the contemporary stage made them now abhor more intensely than ever. "Tragedy, as it was anciently composed," he urges, "hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems" ; and again, after certain quotations in support of his position, "This is mentioned

to vindicate Tragedy from the small esteem, or rather infamy, which in the account of many it undergoes at this day, with other common interludes ; happening through the poet's error of intermixing comic stuff with tragic sadness and gravity, or introducing trivial and vulgar persons." Here, then, we note that, as in "Paradise Lost," classic forms are used for Christian subject-matter: the hedonist and the Puritan in Milton are again found united. As for the subject itself, while Milton's jottings of 1640-41 prove that it had early been in his mind, the reason of his final choice of it must probably be sought in the influence of personal and national conditions. He saw in Samson the image, it would seem, of many things ; of England lured away by the seductions of the Dalila of the Restoration ; of the Puritan cause overwhelmed by the Philistines ; of himself, blind, disappointed, surrounded by foes to his principles and faith.[1] Thus the drama became the vehicle of his bitter grief over his forlorn old age, the blasting of all his hopes, the apostasy of his beloved country. At the same time, it is not bitter grief alone that finds expression in it. "Samson Agonistes" is also a prophecy of judgment to come. Milton's firm faith in the ultimate triumph of righteousness, proclaimed so nobly many years before in "Comus," is with him still to console and inspire. This faith is voiced by the Chorus,

[1] In Samson's marriage to the Philistine woman there may even be a reference to his own first marriage.

with the added thought, so pregnant of meaning at the time, that patience may be the only way in which the good man can show his courage and his confidence in God :

> Oh, how comely it is, and how reviving
> To the spirits of just men long oppressed
> When God into the hands of their deliverer
> Puts invincible might
> To quell the mighty of the earth, the oppressor,
> The brute and boist'rous force of violent men,
> Hardy and industrious to support
> Tyrannic pow'r, but raging to pursue
> The righteous and all such as honour Truth !
> He all their ammunition
> And feats of war defeats,
> With plain heroic magnitude of mind
> And celestial vigour armed ;
> Their armouries and magazines contemns,
> Renders them useless ; while
> With wingèd expedition,
> Swift as the lightning glance, He executes
> His errand on the wicked, who, surprised,
> Lose their defence, distracted and amazed.
> But patience is more oft the exercise
> Of saints, the trial of their fortitude,
> Making them each his own deliverer,
> And victor over all
> That tyranny or fortune can inflict.

And when, in the final tragedy, Samson has met his death among his foes, the moralising of the Chorus is in an equally characteristic strain :

> All is best, though we oft doubt
> What the unsearchable Dispose

Of Highest Wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close.
Oft He seems to hide His Face,
But unexpectedly returns,
And to His faithful champion hath in place
Bore witness gloriously ; whence Gaza mourns,
And all that band them to resist
His uncontrollable Intent.
His servants He, with new acquist
Of true experience, from this great event
With peace and consolation hath dismissed,
And calm of mind, all passion spent.

These last words of the drama form no unfitting conclusion to Milton's poetic work. He wrote no more verse. Busied still with various prose writings and with an edition of his early poems, he passed the three remaining years of his life quietly enough, though he suffered much from recurrent attacks of gout, which gradually undermined his strength. The end came so peacefully that those watching did not know the actual moment of his death. This occurred on Sunday, November 8, 1674. He was buried near his father in the chancel of St. Giles's, Cripplegate.

VI

I HAVE told my story very clumsily if I have not made it clear that in Milton the man is inseparable from the poet, and that the admiration we feel for his genius may quite as justly be given to his character. His faults are indeed apparent ; and I have made no

attempt to minimise or condone them. That they were in large measure the faults which Puritanism inevitably tended to foster, especially in its extreme, though natural, reaction against the flippant spirit of the age—this, too, is evident. Austere, uncompromising, exacting, often stern, sometimes stiff-necked, he had too little tolerance for the weaknesses of average humanity ; too little of " the quality of mercy " which " droppeth as the gentle rain from Heaven " upon the dry soil of the world ; too little of the charity which is careful at all times to distinguish between the sin and the sinner. Large as was his intellectual vision, generous as was his scholarship, his moral outlook was, therefore, narrow; his temper hard and inflexible. Yet, however severely we may judge his shortcomings, his supreme greatness as a man cannot for a moment be questioned even by those who dissent the most profoundly from his politics and his theology. From first to last he lived his life at high moral tension ; and his tremendous earnestness, his passionate zeal for righteousness, his ardent partiotism, his never-failing devotion to duty, combine to make him worthy of our deepest veneration. That we sometimes perhaps seem to be ill at ease in his presence is only another testimony to his nobility. Conscious that his every action was performed beneath his " great Taskmaster's eye," he thought of existence always as service, and strove to the utmost that the work which had been given him to do should be well anp

faithfully done. We can feel the spirit of this high idealism in all the stormy activities of his public career. We can feel it equally in all his efforts and achievements as a poet. He realised to the full the greatness of his genius, and he often spoke of it with a frankness which might seem to border on intellectual pride. But this was precisely because he regarded it as a direct gift from God, for the proper use of which he was in turn directly responsible to God. From the beginning, it is very clear, the poetic life meant for him a life of dedication to the purest and noblest of purposes. "I was confirmed in this opinion," he writes in one place, "that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that is praiseworthy."[1] Again, speaking at the age of thirty-three of his ambitions as a poet and of the long and painful preparation which would be necessary for the accomplishment of the great task to which he was presently to set his hand, he uses these remarkable words: "None hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more unwearied spirit none shall—that I dare almost aver of myself, as far as life and full license will extend. Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing

[1] "Apology for Smectymnuus."

reader that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him towards the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine, like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar to touch and purify the life of whom he pleases. To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous acts and affairs." [1] Here in Milton's deeply religious conception of his mission as a poet we have the true note of his character as a man ; and, as I have tried to show, the character of the man was one of the fundamental elements in that of the poet. What, then, of the poet as poet, and of his place in literature ? Concerning these questions there can be no serious dispute. Next to Shakespeare's, his is the greatest name in the long and glorious annals of our English poetry.

[1] "The Reason of Church Government."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following list contains the titles of some books and essays which may be specially recommended for the further study of Milton and his work:

TEXT:

"Poetical Works of John Milton," edited by Masson. (Globe edition.)

"English Poems," edited by R. C. Browne. (Clarendon Press; 2 vols.)

The annotated school editions, by A. W. Verity, of Milton's poems (separate volumes in the Pitt Press Series) will also be found extremely useful.

Milton's "Prose Works," edited by J. A. St. John. (Bohn's Standard Library; 5 vols.)

"English Prose Writings of Milton," edited by Henry Morley. (Carisbrooke Library: Routledge.)

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BIOGRAPHY AND CRITICISM:

Masson, D.: "Life and Times of John Milton" (six vols.). (A very exhaustive work, containing a detailed account of Milton's age as well as of his life.)

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Pattison, M.: "Milton" (English Men of Letters).

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The reader may also be glad to turn to two works of fiction in which Milton's home-life is dealt with : A. Manning's " The Maiden and Married Life of Mary Powell," and its sequel, " Deborah's Diary."

HISTORY :

For the general history of Milton's time reference may be made to—

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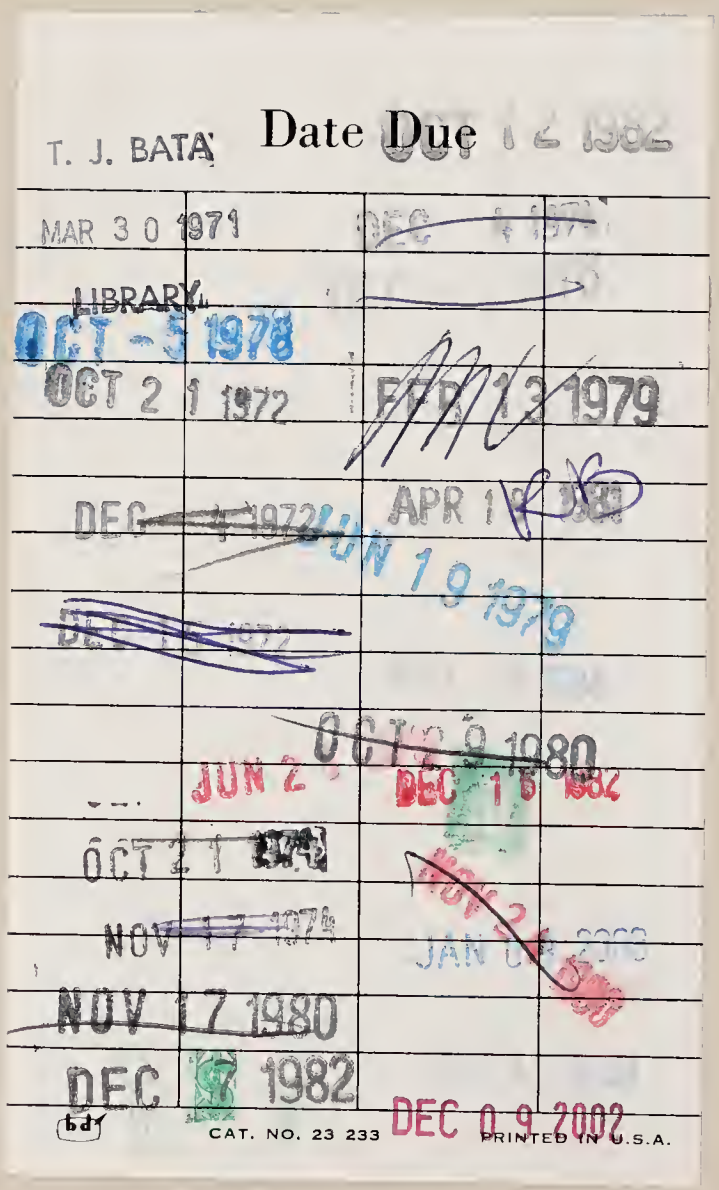
—— " The First Two Stuarts and the Puritan Revolution " (Epochs of Modern History).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